O Captain! My Captain!

POEM TEXT

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.

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.

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.

SUMMARY

Oh Captain, my Captain! Our hard journey is over. The ship has survived every storm, and we've won the prize we've been fighting for. The port is close by and I hear bells ringing and people celebrating. All their eyes are on the steady ship, that bold and brave vessel. But oh, my heart! heart! heart! Oh, look at the drops of blood on the deck where my captain is lying cold and dead.

Oh Captain, my Captain! Get up and listen to the bells. Get up—they're waving the flag for you—they're playing the bugle for you. They've brought bouquets and wreaths with ribbons for you—all these people are crowding on the shore for you. The swaying crowd is calling for you, and all the people's eager faces turning towards you. Here Captain! My dear father! I'll put my arm under your head. I must be dreaming that on the deck, you're lying cold and dead.

My Captain isn't answering me. His lips are pale and unmoving. My father doesn't feel my arm beneath his head, since he has no pulse or consciousness. The ship has anchored safely, and its journey is over. After this hard journey, the victorious ship has returned with its prize. Let the crowds celebrate and the bells ring! Meanwhile I, slowly and sadly, walk across the deck where my Captain is lying cold and dead.

THEMES

VICTORY AND LOSS

Even as the poem "O Captain! My Captain!" celebrates the end of the American Civil War, it is also an elegy for President Abraham Lincoln. Victory and loss are thus closely intertwined throughout the poem. On the one hand, its mourning is tempered with joyful reminders that the war is won. Its celebrations, on the other hand, are haunted by melancholy. In this sense, Whitman's poem illuminates the lingering pain and trauma of losses sustained in war—as well as the impossibility of ever separating the triumph of victory from its human costs.

In its juxtaposition of the language of loss and victory, "O Captain! My Captain!" uses poetic form to model the close relationship between triumph and pain. At first, it seems as if this will be a poem celebrating the victory of the Union in the Civil War. The speaker congratulates President Lincoln on steering the metaphorical ship of state through "every wrack," i.e. storm, and declares that "the prize we sought is won." However, halfway through this triumphant first stanza, the speaker breaks off: "But O heart! heart! heart! ... my Captain lies, / Fallen cold and dead." The sudden appearance of a qualification—"*But* O heart!"—reveals to the reader that not all is well. The poem scarcely has time to celebrate triumph before facing loss.

One of the poem's painful ironies is that its celebrations are intended to honor the leader who won this victory, yet President Lincoln is not there to witness the triumph. This is

made all the starker by the joyous scenes that begin each stanza: there are ringing bells, "bouquets," "wreaths," and cheering crowds. The poem juxtaposes these moments of vibrancy and happiness with the body of the "Captain", which is "cold," "dead," "pale," and "still."

The speaker also emphasizes that all of these celebrations are *for* President Lincoln with the repetition of the word "you"—"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 poet repeats five times. The repetition of the word further underscores the poignancy of Lincoln's absence from his own celebration.

Even small formal features like the poem's punctuation register the tension between celebration and mourning, as the speaker's emotions descend from joy to grief. For example, the exclamation points after "O Captain!" in the first stanza seem like enthusiastic celebrations of victory. Later in the poem, however, the meaning of the exclamation points begins to subtly change. "O heart!" becomes an exclamation of grief and dismay. The exclamation points after "O Captain!" in the second stanza take on even darker connotations, since it's now clear that the speaker is addressing a dead man rather than a living leader. The five total exclamation points in this stanza take on a desperate quality, as if the speaker is begging the fallen leader to come back to life again. By the final stanza, there is only a single exclamation point, marking the poem's newly restrained tone of quiet grief. The speaker acknowledges that the world around him is celebrating—"Exult O shores, and ring O bells!"—but he walks with "mournful tread," grieving even as the country rejoices.

Throughout, the speaker dramatizes the painfully close relationship between loss and victory. The celebration of the Union's triumph is reframed by the reminder that the country has paid a dear price. Whitman seems to argue that loss and victory are closely linked in *all* wartime settings, where victory always requires the expenditure of human life.

Where this theme appears in the poem:

- Line 1
- Lines 1-4
- Line 5
- Line 6
- Line 7
- Line 8
- Line 9
- Line 10
- Line 11
- Line 12
- Line 13
- Line 14
- Line 15
- Line 16
- Lines 17-20
- Line 21
- Line 22
- Line 23
- Line 24

GRIEF AND ISOLATION

Each stanza of "O Captain! My Captain!" pivots between public celebration and private grief. In this way, the poem foregrounds the tension between outward emotional expression and internal emotional experience. The speaker must reconcile his *personal* grief for President Lincoln, whom he seems to regard as a paternal figure, with the wider grief—and joy—of the nation. Through these tensions, Whitman suggests that deep grief for a loved one can be an isolating force that makes loss even more painful than it might otherwise be.

The tension between collective experience and private emotion is implied even in the title of the poem, "O Captain! My Captain!" The speaker compares President Lincoln to the captain of a ship and then refers to him as *my* captain, emphasizing his own personal connection to the president. The poem is not titled "*Our* Captain"; rather, the speaker seems to feel that President Lincoln is *his* captain in particular. Logically, the captain of a ship is indeed everyone's captain, but the poet's choice to emphasize the personal pronoun makes the loss seem private and personal rather than public.

The public celebrations that accompany the return of the ship into the harbor—metaphorically standing in for the victory of the Union in the Civil War—are a shared experience of joy. By contrast, the speaker's experience of grief is private and solitary. The descriptions of the crowds give the impression of a shared public experience. The "people" are "*all* exulting"; they are "a-crowding" and form a "swaying mass" on the shore. They seem to have become a kind of collective, feeling together and expressing themselves as one body.

On the other hand, the depiction of the speaker himself emphasizes his isolation and solitary melancholy. Although he "hear[s] … the bells," he ignores them and walks alone, "with mournful tread." The poem presents an experience of collective rejoicing, but the speaker chooses to physically and emotionally separate himself from the crowd. The isolated nature of the speaker's grief seems to result from his perception of his relationship with Lincoln. That is, his mourning seems to transcend the sorrow of a citizen for the assassination of a leader to become more like that of a son for his father. Indeed, the speaker repeatedly refers to President Lincoln as "father."

The poem's final stanza thus introduces another layer of emotional complexity, as the speaker's grief becomes yet more

private and personal in contrast to the rejoicing of the crowds. The speaker admits that "[m]y father does not feel my arm" and "he has no pulse," implying that the speaker has physically touched and shaken the body to feel for a pulse. This gesture is highly private and intimate, more like a familial relationship than that of a citizen and a leader. It's clear that the speaker feels so strongly about the fallen leader that he experiences a close, almost paternal relationship with him. The fact that the speaker's intense, private grief contrasts so sharply with the cheering crowds suggests that losing a loved one can create a painful boundary between an individual and other people.

Where this theme appears in the poem:

- Line 1
- Line 3
- Line 5
- Line 6
- Line 7
- Line 8
- Line 9
- Lines 9-10
- Line 11
- Lines 11-12
- Line 13
- Line 14
- Line 15
- Line 16
- Line 17
- Line 18
- Line 21
- Line 22
- Line 23
- Line 24

THE INDIVIDUAL VS. THE NATION

"O Captain! O Captain!" depicts the overwhelming grief and trauma that followed one of the most notorious political assassinations in United States history. At the same time, it suggests that the nation will move on and even *thrive* after the loss of its leader. In doing so, the poem interrogates the relationship between the individual and the wider political community, ultimately suggesting that the United States as a nation is a political project that can and must transcend the life of any single person—even though individuals are still very important.

The poem's extended metaphor compares President Lincoln to a captain steering the "ship of state"— guiding the Union through the Civil War. However, the "captain" of the title turns out to be less essential to the continuing success and unity of the nation than it might initially seem. At first it seems like the "captain," President Lincoln, is solely responsible for the safe return of the ship after it has "weather'd every rack," that is, survived every storm and finally made it home. But the poem also hints that this is not entirely the case: even in the first stanza, the speaker refers to the voyage as "*our* fearful trip," implying that the community has survived these trials by banding together and assuming shared responsibility.

The idea that President Lincoln might not be entirely essential to the nation's victory becomes clearer when the citizens continue to rejoice after their captain has fallen. Even while the "Captain lies / Fallen cold and dead," the people celebrate victory with bugles, bells, and public commemorations. Their grief at the assassination of the president does not stop them from continuing their celebrations and moving on with life. Although the speaker claims that the celebrations are "*for* you [i.e. President Lincoln]," this starts to look more like wishful thinking as the poem continues. The people don't seem to require the physical presence of President Lincoln in order to celebrate; the commemoration of the Union's victory takes on a life of its own, persisting as a community celebration even without the presence of a leader to direct it.

However, this emphasis on communal strength is complicated by the speaker's own ambivalent relationship to the crowds that await the ship's arrival. He seems to feel that he has little in common with them, since his grief alienates him from the general mood of celebration. This contrast shows how meaningful individuals (like the fallen "Captain") are within collective efforts, even if those efforts can still succeed without them. Each stanza of the poem is split between the first four lines, which generally depict communal scenes of rejoicing, and the final four lines, which typically feature expressions of the speaker's personal grief. This consistent divide suggests that the speaker still feels a great deal of individual pain at the loss of his leader, despite the joy of his broader community. The speaker even chooses to remain on board the ship while the communal celebrations go on. The bells ring and the "shores … exult," but he chooses to "walk the deck my Captain lies," alone. This physical separation reinforces the significance of the loss of the captain.

While the nation manages to move forward without President Lincoln, the speaker can't quite join in the celebrations—the loss of his leader is still agonizing, even though the nation has survived. Ultimately, the poem seems to argue that collectivity is necessary for the survival of the United States, but it also acknowledges that individual people play crucial roles within this collective effort.

Where this theme appears in the poem:

- Line 1
- Line 2
- Line 3
- Line 7
- Line 8

- Lines 10-12
- Line 16
- Lines 17-18
- Line 19
- Line 20
- Line 21
- Line 22
- Line 23
- Line 24

LINE-BY-LINE ANALYSIS

LINES 1-4

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;

The opening lines of the poem depict scenes of rejoicing following a ship's victorious return to harbor. The speaker addresses the captain as he congratulates him on navigating the ship through a "fearful" (i.e. frightening) journey filled with "racks," or storms. After all these dangers, the ship has returned home, having won the "prize" of victory. The port celebrates by greeting the victorious ship with cheers and bells. The ship is described as "steady" but also battle-hardened, "grim," and "daring," thus emphasizing its bravery and longevity in the face of long dangers.

These opening lines have a measured rhythm that mirrors the speaker's celebratory tone. The lines are made up of two rhyming couplets, so the rhyme scheme follows a regular pattern of AABB.

The meter of the lines, too, follows a regular iambic pattern, like this:

The port is near, the bells I hear, the people all
exulting,

This rhythmical regularity emphasizes the ceremonial, almost stately quality of this scene. It seems as if everyone is sharing in the collective celebrations. And indeed, the poem is an extended metaphor for the Union's joy when the American Civil War ended in 1865. After four years of vicious fighting that cost many American lives, the Union—which the poet compares to a ship—finally declared victory against the Confederacy. In the poem, this triumph is compared to a ship coming home to harbor. These lines suggest that everyone in the Union rejoiced with equal fervor at the end of a long and painful journey.

The fact that the poem opens with a repeated apostrophe—which, from context, readers will know is addressed to Abraham Lincoln—also immediately establishes the president as responsible for this great victory.

LINE 6

O the bleeding drops of red,

After the celebratory tone of the previous lines, these next four lines come as something of a shock. The speaker suddenly interrupts himself, proclaiming "But O heart! heart! heart!" The use of the conjunction "but" emphasizes the abrupt change of tone from the triumphant rhetoric of the first half of the stanza. The epizeuxis of "heart" creates a sense of repetitive beating, much like the beating of a heart itself. This is further reflected by the meter: this line is not iambic and has little of the metrical regularity of the previous four lines:

But O heart! heart! heart!

Instead, the line has a rather choppy, staccato rhythm, a formal quality that mirrors the speaker's disturbed state of mind. The speaker now apostrophizes—or addresses—his heart, and then exclaims over the "bleeding drops of red," a poetic phrase for the gruesome sight of the captain's blood spilling across the deck of the ship. But the poet soon abandons metaphor and admits flatly that "on the deck my Captain lies, / Fallen cold and dead." The directness of these lines, which contain little figurative language, reinforces the harsh and cold reality of the captain's death. The end-stop of line 8 bolsters this sense of finality.

The captain who has "fallen cold and dead" represents President Lincoln, who was assassinated in 1865, just after the Union won the Civil War. The juxtaposition between the rejoicing on shore and the grief on board the ship thus represents the feeling of many Americans like the poet Walt Whitman, who were forced to contend with the loss of their leader in his greatest moment of triumph.

LINES 9-12

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;

These lines return to the celebratory scenes of the first lines of the poem, but this time their air of rejoicing takes on a darker aspect. The speaker describes how the harbor welcomes the ship back to port: with ringing bells, flags, bugles, bouquets, and wreaths. Yet all these signs of triumph are intended to honor the one person who cannot join in the communal celebration: the captain, who has "fallen cold and dead" on the deck of the ship.

The speaker clearly feels the captain's loss keenly, as indicated

by the continued use of apostrophe: Note the way he begs the captain to "rise up." When this phrase appears in line 9, it is a subtle transformation of the phrase "O Captain! My Captain!" It turns out that this exclamation is not just in praise of the captain, as it looked to be in the first stanza; it is actually a way of imploring the captain to rise up from where he has fallen, so that he can "hear the bells" in the rejoicing city.

The speaker then repeats the phrase, begging the captain to "rise up" and see all the celebrations dedicated to him. This anaphora gives the impression that the speaker actually believes—or is trying to convince himself—that the captain might rise again and come back to life. This is further reflected by the double stress of the trochee that begins line 10:

> Rise up

These lines also return to the iambic form of the poem's first four lines. However, they have a more disorganized and disjointed quality than those lines, since they are broken up several times by a caesura, or pause. Here, for instance, the dashes interrupt the flow of the lines:

> 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,

This is still iambic meter, but the less orderly appearance of these lines underlines the speaker's increasingly frantic energy as he begs the captain to "rise up" and see the celebrations. Note in particular how line 11 is the longest, visually, in the poem, as if the speaker is trying to "crowd" as much as he can in the stanza in order to reach the fallen captain.

LINES 13-18

Here Captain! dear father!
This arm beneath your head!
It is some dream that on the deck,
You've fallen cold and dead.
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 speaker's desperation reaches new heights here, as he continues to try to rouse the captain. He exclaims "this arm beneath your head," implying that the speaker is using his own arm try to physically lift the captain's head so that the captain can see the rejoicings on shore. The striking intimacy and physicality of this action underscores the speaker's emotional connection to the captain. This is also reflected by the "You've" in line 16, which otherwise is exactly the same as line 8. The second stanza ends in the same way as the first—with a full end-stop evocatively following the word "dead"—but the addition of the "You've" adds a more personal touch to the line.

Indeed, in line 13 he refers to the captain as "dear father," an affectionate address that transforms their encounter from a hierarchical servant/master relationship to a familial relationship between father and son. The phrase "dear father" in one sense refers to President Lincoln's status as the metaphorical "father" of the nation of the United States. But the intimacy of this moment—the speaker and the captain are seemingly the only people on board—makes the address of "father" feel far more personal, as if the speaker really is losing a parent. This becomes all the more striking in line 18, as "dear father" and "my captain" combine into "My father."

By continuing to try to wake the captain, the speaker is seemingly attempting to deny the harsh fact of the captain's death. His shock and disbelief that this tragedy has come to pass manifests as a denial of reality, and he even suggests that the captain's death is all "some dream." But lines 17 and 18 puncture this illusion, since the speaker admits that the captain is "pale and still," has no pulse, and can't feel his touch.

In a poem characterized by repeated direct address—"O Captain! my Captain!"—the admission that the captain "does not answer" is a significant shift. As the poem moves into its final stanza, the speaker seems to be coming to terms with the reality that the captain is dead and will not be able to reply. The caesuras that break up lines 17 and 18 add to this sense of measuredness: these commas create brief moments for the speaker to catch his breath and collect himself as he lays out the reality that the Captain is never coming back.

LINES 19-24

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.

Lines 19 and 20 are almost exactly the same, metrically and thematically, as the triumphant lines of the first stanza. Like those lines, the meter follows a regular iambic rhythm:

> From fearful trip the victor ship comes in with object won;

In particular line, line 20, note how the stress falls on the final word "won," emphasizing the glory of the ship's victory in battle. In this sense, the lines also share the thematic preoccupation of earlier stanzas with scenes of celebration and rejoicing. At the same time, however, the celebratory nature of these lines takes on a much darker and ironic tone. Although the ship is "safe and sound" and has survived a "fearful" journey (a word that appears for the second time in the poem), these pronouncements ring somewhat hollow in light of the speaker's admission that the captain "lies / Fallen cold and dead." The clear *poetry* of these lines seems almost an affront to the

speaker's grief: moments like the sibilance of "safe and sound" and the internal rhyme of "trip and ship" add a sense of happy musicality that feels out of place.

The stark juxtaposition between joy and mourning is underscored in the poem's final lines, in which the speaker looks at the crowds as they "exult," or celebrate, but feels separated from them by his grief. His grief increasingly isolates him from others, as he physically places a barrier between himself and the crowds: they are on the shore and he is on the "deck" of the ship where the captain lies dead. He walks slowly and sadly, with "mournful tread," while everyone else around him seems to be celebrating. Ironically, it is in the moment of greatest collective triumph—the return of the ship, standing in metaphorically for the Union's victory in the Civil War—that the speaker feels most alone with his grief.

This final stanza again ends with the repetition of "fallen cold and dead," creating a stark image as the poem itself comes to a close.

SYMBOLS

THE SHIP

The extended metaphor in "O Captain! My Captain!" compares President Lincoln to the captain of a ship—a ship that then becomes a symbol for the United States itself. The speaker asserts that the ship has undergone many trials over the course of its journey, including storms, fighting, and other dangers. This description of a perilous journey is intended to represent the divisive and bloody struggle between the Union and the Confederacy during the American Civil War. The speaker attributes the ship's safe return to the harbor to the bravery and leadership of the captain, just as many attributed the Union's victory to the statesmanship of President Lincoln.

Tragically, however, the speaker reveals that the captain lies dead on the deck of the ship while the city rejoices—a metaphor for recent events, since President Lincoln was assassinated in 1865 and was unable to celebrate his victory. In this sense, the ship is a symbol of national unity and perseverance that nonetheless becomes a site of loss and tragedy in the poem.

Where this symbol appears in the poem:

- **Line 2:** "ship"
- **Line 4:** "vessel"
- **Line 7:** "deck"
- **Line 15:** "deck"
- **Line 19:** "ship"
- **Line 20:** "ship"
- **Line 23:** "deck," "Captain"

POETIC DEVICES

EXTENDED METAPHOR

The entire poem—from the title onwards—relies on an extended metaphor that compares President Lincoln to a captain and the United States to a ship. In this metaphor, the poet describes how the ship has endured many "racks" (i.e. storms), "fearful" journeys, and dangers—metaphorically standing in for the destructive battles of the American Civil War—before finally coming home to harbor having won what the speaker calls its "prize" or "object." This prize is a metaphor for the Union's victory in the war, which had finally come about, after a long struggle, in 1865. The speaker describes how the "ship is anchor'd safe and sound," just as the Union emerged triumphant after years of struggle against the Confederacy.

But although the ship's voyage comes to an end, this is not the conclusion of the extended metaphor. What looks like a triumphant nautical metaphor for President Lincoln's able leadership and the Union's victory soon turns tragic, as it turns out that the "captain" of the poem's governing metaphor has in fact died, even as the city celebrates the victorious ship. In this way, the poet takes a conventional extended metaphor—comparing a political leader to a captain of a ship—and recasts it in a more melancholy and reflective tone.

Where Extended Metaphor appears in the poem:

- Lines 1-4
- Line 5
- Line 6
- Line 7
- Line 8
- Lines 9-12
- Line 13
- Line 14
- Line 15
- Line 16
- Lines 17-20
- Line 21
- Line 22
- Line 23
- Line 24

ALLITERATION

The speaker of the poem tends to use alliteration in moments of particular emotional intensity. In the second stanza, for instance, he calls upon his captain to "rise up" and live again, inviting him to witness the celebrations and the "**fl**ag" that is "**fl**ung." Here the use of the same /fl/ sound at the beginning of

the words "flag" and "flung" seems deliberate, since the poet could have easily used the word "hung" instead—which rhymes and has a similar meaning.

Alliteration appears again later in the stanza, when the speaker protests that "it is some dream that on the deck, / You've fallen cold and dead." "Dream," "deck," and "dead" are linked by the /d/ sound at the beginning of both words (a connection made all the stronger by the consonance of cold and again of "dead"), establishing a material link with the reality of the captain's death even as the speaker tries to deny it.

Finally, alliteration takes on a more muted tone in the restrained final stanza, when the ship returns "safe and sound." The alliteration in this phrase is well-known because the association between "safe" and "sound" is common. But the speaker also makes more subtle use of alliteration when he observes of the captain that "his lips are pale and still" and "he has no pulse nor will." Alliteration links the words "pale" and "pulse," just as rhyme links the words "still" and "will."

Where Alliteration appears in the poem:

- **Line 1:** "C," "C"
- **Line 2:** "p," "w," "w"
- **Line 3:** "p," "p"
- **Line 5:** "h," "h," "h"
- **Line 6:** "d"
- **Line 7:** "d," "C"
- **Line 8:** "c," "d"
- **Line 9:** "C," "C"
- **Line 10:** "f," "fl," "fl," "f," "b"
- **Line 11:** "b"
- **Line 15:** "d," "d"
- **Line 16:** "d"
- **Line 17:** "p"
- **Line 18:** "p"
- **Line 19:** "s," "s"
- **Line 20:** "w," "w"
- **Line 21:** "O," "O"
- **Line 23:** "d," "C"
- **Line 24:** "c," "d"

EPISTROPHE

Much of the poem's emotional power is linked to its use of epistrophe (though these lines could arguably also be classified as a refrain). Each stanza of "O Captain! My Captain!" ends with the words "fallen cold and dead." This is particularly striking given the richness of vocabulary and description offered by the speaker elsewhere in the poem, including unusual words like "rack," "keel," and "a-swaying." With a wealth of language from which to choose, the speaker keeps returning to those four, largely monosyllabic words.

The starkness of the words "cold" and "dead" stands in sharp contrast to the scenes of rejoicing and celebration depicted on shore. While the crowds engage in a wealth of activity—ringing bells, "exulting" or cheering, presenting bouquets and wreaths—these lines emphasize the captain's stillness in contrast to the energy outside. Even before the speaker checks the captain's pulse, it is clear that he is dead and has, as the speaker puts it, "no pulse nor will."

The effect of this epistrophe or repetition is also to remind the speaker—and the reader—that there is no escaping the reality of the captain's death. The speaker protests in the second stanza that it must be "some dream" that something so awful could have come to pass, but the repetition of "cold" and "dead" makes it clear that this is wishful thinking. The poem ends with the words "fallen cold and dead," and the third appearance of this phrase provides an unambiguous reminder of the harshness of reality and the irrevocability of death.

Where Epistrophe appears in the poem:

- **Line 8:** "Fallen cold and dead."
- **Line 16:** "fallen cold and dead."
- **Line 24:** "Fallen cold and dead."

APOSTROPHE

The title of "O Captain! My Captain!" itself is an example of apostrophe, or direct address, and even from its first lines the poem makes frequent use of this poetic device. The use of the word "O" is an old-fashioned way of indicating the "vocative," or addressing someone directly. Throughout the poem, the speaker seems to be addressing his "captain," a symbolic stand-in for President Lincoln, in strikingly direct and intimate terms.

The speaker uses apostrophe for a variety of purposes. He gives orders, telling his captain to "rise up and hear the bells." He begs and implores the captain to "rise up," reminding him that there are wreaths and bouquets present to celebrate him. And he also uses the apostrophe to establish a quasi-familial intimacy between himself and the captain, whom he addresses as "dear father."

Apostrophe thus allows the speaker to address President Lincoln in a range of emotional registers. But President Lincoln is not the only recipient of apostrophe in the poem. The speaker also addresses the crowds on the shores ("Exult, o shores"), the bells ("ring, O bells!"), and even his own heart ("O heart! heart! heart!"). This last instance of apostrophe pushes the poetic device to its logical limits, as one cannot of course directly address a heart. But the effect of this apostrophe is to foreground the speaker's distress and desire for connection and intimacy, as he calls upon people and things that cannot respond to his address.

Where Apostrophe appears in the poem:

- **Line 1:** "O Captain! my Captain!"
- **Line 5:** " But O heart! heart! heart!"
- **Line 6:** " O the bleeding drops of red,"
- **Line 9:** "O Captain! my Captain!"
- **Line 13:** " Here Captain! dear father!"
- **Line 21:** " Exult O shores, and ring O bells!"

CAESURA

"O Captain! My Captain!" features many instances of caesura, but arguably the most striking moment comes at almost precisely the center of the poem. In the second stanza, the speaker begs his captain to "rise up" from his grave, since all the commemorations of victory are intended to honor the captain's bravery: "[F]or you the flag is flung—for you the bugle trills; For you bouquets and ribbon'd wreaths—for you the shores a-crowding."

These are the only instances of dashes in the poem, which makes their inclusion particularly striking. In one sense, the dashes create a formal caesura or pause in the poem, offering a reprieve from the otherwise consistent and predictable rhyming ballad meter of the rest of the stanzas. Yet the dashes also function to run together or conflate a long list of different forms of nationalistic celebration: the displaying of flags, the playing of musical instruments, the presentation of flowers and wreaths, and the gathering of crowds. The list thus takes on a breathless quality, as the speaker rushes to enumerate all the forms of commemoration and honor that await the captain, if he were only to open his eyes. But the impression that this list is unfolding with alarming momentum gains added poignancy in contrast to the simple, direct lines of the rest of the stanza, in which the speaker admits that the captain's body is "cold and dead."

Caesura thus functions in the poem to emphasize the speaker's increasingly agitated and desperate state of mind as he struggles to rouse the captain, only to ultimately acknowledge that those efforts are futile.

Where Caesura appears in the poem:

- **Line 1:** "!," "!"
- **Line 2:** ","
- **Line 3:** ","
- **Line 4:** ","
- **Line 5:** "!," "!"
- **Line 9:** "!," "!"
- **Line 10:** "—," "—"
- **Line 11:** "—"
- **Line 12:** ","
- **Line 13:** "!"
- **Line 17:** ","
- **Line 18:** ","
- **Line 19:** ","
- **Line 21:** ","

ANAPHORA

The poem's title and most famous phrase—"O Captain! My Captain!"—can arguably be thought of as an example of anaphora. The repetition of the phrase at the beginning of the first two stanzas allows the reader to track the emotional shifts throughout the poem, as the same phrase comes to signify different things. In the poem's first stanza, the address to "my captain" looks like a straightforward statement of praise as the poet lauds the captain—metaphorically standing in for President Abraham Lincoln—for his courage and leadership, stating that "the prize we sought is won." But as the poem continues and it becomes clear that the captain has died, the phrase takes on a darker tone. In the second stanza, the speaker begs President Lincoln to "rise up and hear the bells." "O Captain! My Captain!" starts to look less like a triumphant address and more like a desperate plea to the captain to wake again.

Similarly, another use of anaphora emphasizes the speaker's increasing distress and desperation, as he urges the captain to wake up and tells him "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," repeating the phrase "for you" no less than five times. The speaker seems to be trying to change the reality of the captain's death through sheer persistent repetition. In this sense, anaphora is not just used in the poem for metrical convenience; it offers the poet a language through which to express his shifting attitudes and emotional orientations around the captain's death.

Where Anaphora appears in the poem:

- **Line 1:** "O Captain! my Captain!"
- **Line 9:** "O Captain! my Captain!"
- **Line 10:** "for you," "for you"
- **Line 11:** "For you," "for you"
- **Line 12:** "For you"
- **Line 17:** "My Captain"

END-STOPPED LINE

Throughout the poem, "O Captain! My Captain!" is arguably characterized entirely by end-stopped lines rather than enjambed lines. For example, each of the lines here is an independent grammatical unit and ends with a comma:

> 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 rigid separation between each line of verse gives the poem a slow, stately tone. It makes the poem easy to memorize and recite, since each line is a distinct grammatical sentence or thought—in fact, this is perhaps why the poem has been so frequently taught in classrooms since it was first published in the nineteenth century.

The end-stopped lines also impose a form of control and restraint on the poem as a whole. Even when the emotions expressed seem intense and even overwhelming, the poem contains each thought within the structure of an end-stopped line. This is particularly clear with the full stops that end each stanza following the word "dead"—grammatically reflecting the content of these lines and underscoring the finality of the captain's death itself.

Lines 6 and 23 could possibly be thought of as being enjambed, given that their full significance is only apparent after reading the following lines. Given the context of the rest of the poem, however, with its very strong emphasis on end-stop throughout, we'd consider these more accurately to be end-stopped.

Where End-Stopped Line appears in the poem:

- **Line 1:** "done,"
- **Line 2:** "won,"
- **Line 3:** "exulting,"
- **Line 4:** "daring;"
- **Line 5:** "heart!"
- **Line 6:** "red,"
- **Line 7:** "lies,"
- **Line 8:** "dead."
- **Line 9:** "bells;"
- **Line 10:** "trills,"
- **Line 11:** "a-crowding,"
- **Line 12:** "turning;"
- **Line 13:** "father!"
- **Line 14:** "head!"
- **Line 15:** "deck,"
- **Line 16:** "dead."
- **Line 17:** "still,"
- **Line 18:** "will,"
- **Line 19:** "done,"
- **Line 20:** "won;"
- **Line 21:** "bells!"
- **Line 22:** "tread,"
- **Line 23:** "lies,"
- **Line 24:** "dead."

PERSONIFICATION

The speaker often uses personification to imbue non-feeling and non-thinking objects with human characteristics. For example, in the final stanza, the shores "exult," or celebrate, the ship's victory at sea. Logically, shores can of course not celebrate on their own accord; the speaker uses personification as a way to describe the experience of collective rejoicing on shore. Similarly, the bugle "trills" in line 10, a human-like sound, but it actually the person playing the bugle who makes the sound through the instrument. The vessel is described as "grim and daring" in line 4, a set of personality characteristics more often associated with humans. Perhaps all this use of personification helps the poet emphasize the mood of collective rejoicing; everyone appears to be in such good spirits that even inanimate objects are joining in the celebration.

Where Personification appears in the poem:

- **Line 4:** "the vessel grim and daring"
- **Line 10:** "the bugle trills"
- **Line 21:** "Exult O shores"

EPIZEUXIS

"O Captain! My Captain!" makes one strong use of epizeuxis with the repetition of the word "heart" in line 5. Saying this word three times in a row—with an exclamation mark each time, no less—clearly underscores the speaker's shock, grief, and horror.

More subtly, the repetition of "heart" also changes the meter of the poem, creating three stressed beats in a row:

heart! heart! heart!

This infuses the line with a beating sensation not unlike that of an actual heart. The language of this line thus masterfully mirrors its content: the speaker isn't just calling out to his heart, but that *heart itself* is also crying out, making itself—and its immense grief—heard. This, in turn, reflects just how deeply the speaker must care for the fallen captain and underscores what an immense loss the captain's death must be.

The implicit beating of the heart also fills the line with a sense of life and vibrancy amidst its despair—which makes the "coldness" of the captain's dead body feel all the more stark at the end of the stanza.

Where Epizeuxis appears in the poem:

- **Line 5:** "heart! heart! heart!"

IRONY

"O Captain! My Captain!" centers on a painful irony: just when the poem is celebrating the triumph of a ship that has survived many storms and dangers at sea, the captain dies on the deck of his own ship. The situation dramatized in the poem is an extended metaphor for the American political situation in 1865. After four years of civil war, the Union finally declared victory against the Confederacy. But that same year, President

Abraham Lincoln—the metaphorical "captain" of the title—was assassinated. In the poem, the speaker expresses his grief that the captain cannot be present at his own victory celebration.

This irony is emphasized by use of the conjunction "but," which centers the speaker's grief even as the world around him celebrates. For example, even while the bells ring in celebration, the speaker exclaims "*But O* heart!" Similarly, at the end of the poem, the speaker sees the cheering crowds but describes a feeling of separation: "*But* I with mournful tread, / Walk the deck my Captain lies, / Fallen cold and dead." This makes it clear that despite all the rejoicing around him, the speaker is unable to forget his grief—a juxtaposition that emphasizes the irony of the captain's absence precisely in the moment when he should be most triumphant.

Where Irony appears in the poem:

- Lines 1-4
- Line 5
- Line 6
- Line 7
- Line 8
- Lines 9-12
- Lines 17-20
- Line 23
- Line 24

JUXTAPOSITION

"O Captain! My Captain!" makes heavy use of juxtaposition in order to deal with the commemoration of two very different events: the victory of the Union in the American Civil War in 1865, and the assassination of President Abraham Lincoln in that same year.

At first, it seems as if the poem will simply celebrate the triumph of the Union, compared in an extended metaphor to the return of a ship to harbor after a difficult journey at sea. The speaker describes a scene of celebration as the ship returns, including ringing bells and cheering crowds. However, midway through the stanza, he stops and exclaims, "But O heart! heart! heart!"

As mentioned in our discussion of epizeuxis, this line dramatically breaks the iambic meter of the prior quatrain. The speaker laments that the "Captain," or President Lincoln, has "fallen cold and dead" while the city rejoices around him. The next two stanzas similarly stage a juxtaposition between the joy of the crowds on shore—who celebrate with wreaths, flowers, and music—and the sober, melancholy tone on the deck of the ship.

In the poem's final stanza, the speaker compares the ringing bells and "exulting" crowds with his own "mournful tread." This juxtaposition is fitting for a poem that marks both a celebration of the Union's victory and a funeral for the loss of its leader. It adds to the poem's broader sense of irony, in that the man it deems responsible for this victory is the one person who cannot witness it.

Where Juxtaposition appears in the poem:

- Line 1
- Line 2
- Line 3
- Line 5
- Line 6
- Line 7
- Line 8
- Lines 9-10
- Line 9
- Lines 10-12
- Line 16
- Lines 17-18
- Lines 19-20
- Line 21
- Line 22
- Line 23
- Line 24

CONSONANCE

The speaker of the poem tends to use consonance in much the same way that he uses alliteration: that is, to heighten the emotional intensity of certain moments. Consonance is quite common throughout every stanza, and also contributes to the stately, grand feel of the poem: it makes the poem feel highly literary, its language beautifully connected via sound as if to honor the subject at hand. For example, consonance combined with assonance creates moments of internal rhyme with words like "trip" and "ship" in the final stanza and "near" and "hear" in the first. These moments add to the sense of pomp and circumstance in the people's celebrations.

Perhaps the most evocative moments of consonance, however, come at the end of each stanza, with the repeated string of /d/ and hard /c/ sounds. The words may vary slightly from one stanza to the next, but this sonic repetition persists. This building of /d/ sounds—in words like "deck," "drops," "red," "dream," "cold," and "tread"—anticipates the word "dead" as the last word of every stanza, allowing "dead" to land with a thud of finality that serves as a reminder of the ever-present reality of the Captain's death.

The hard /c/ sounds of words like "deck" and "cold" connect them via sound to the "Captain" himself, and create a subtle moment of cacophony that breaks through the joyous celebrations of the crowd in reminder of the one person who is not there to witness this grand victory.

Where Consonance appears in the poem:

- **Line 1:** “C,” “pt,” “n,” “C,” “pt,” “n,” “f,” “f,” “t,” “p”
- **Line 2:** “p,” “p,” “w,” “w”
- **Line 3:** “p,” “r,” “r,” “ll,” “r,” “p,” “pl,” “ll,” “l”
- **Line 4:** “l,” “ll,” “l,” “l”
- **Line 5:** “t,” “h,” “rt,” “h,” “rt,” “h,” “rt”
- **Line 6:** “d,” “dr,” “r,” “d”
- **Line 7:** “d,” “ck,” “C,” “l”
- **Line 8:** “ll,” “c,” “l,” “d,” “d,” “d,” “d”
- **Line 9:** “C,” “pt,” “n,” “C,” “pt,” “n”
- **Line 10:** “f,” “fl,” “g,” “fl,” “f,” “gl,” “ll”
- **Line 11:** “F,” “b,” “q,” “bb,” “f,” “c”
- **Line 12:** “F,” “c,” “s,” “ss,” “f,” “c,” “s”
- **Line 15:** “m,” “d,” “m,” “d,” “ck”
- **Line 16:** “ll,” “c,” “ld,” “d,” “d,” “d”
- **Line 17:** “l,” “ps,” “p,” “l,” “s,” “ll”
- **Line 18:** “f,” “f,” “h,” “h,” “p,” “ls,” “ll”
- **Line 19:** “s,” “nd,” “s,” “nd,” “d,” “nd,” “d,” “n”
- **Line 20:** “Fr,” “f,” “rf,” “tr,” “p,” “r,” “p,” “w,” “w”
- **Line 21:** “b”
- **Line 22:** “B,” “d”
- **Line 23:** “d,” “ck,” “C,” “l”
- **Line 24:** “ll,” “c,” “ld,” “d,” “d,” “d”

VOCABULARY

Fearful (Line 1, Line 20) - The word “fearful” appears twice in the poem, used both times in the phrase “fearful trip.” This implies that the journey undertaken by the ship has been “fearful” in the sense of “inspiring fear.” However, despite the frightening challenges faced by the ship, it has nonetheless returned victorious

Rack (Line 2) - A “rack” is an antiquated term for a storm or gathering of raincloud. When the speaker claims that the ship has “weather’d every rack,” he is asserting that the ship has survived many dangerous storms without being shipwrecked. In the poem’s extended metaphor, these “racks” and storms stand in for the violent battles of the American Civil War, which nearly broke apart the United States.

Exult (Line 3, Line 21) - The speaker describes the crowds that welcome the ship home to harbor as “all exulting.” Here “exulting” means “celebrating.” Similarly, at the end of the poem the crowds "exult" on shore. The celebratory mood of the crowd contrasts sharply with the melancholy and mourning on board the ship, where the captain has fallen dead.

Keel (Line 4) - A “keel” is an old synonym for a ship (indeed, very old; the word dates back to Old English). In the poem, the keel is described as “steady,” suggesting that the ship is sailing smoothly back into harbor after many trials.

Bugle (Line 10) - A bugle is a brass instrument with a sound similar to a horn. The instrument is often used at festivals and communal celebrations. The poet describes people on shore playing bugles as they welcome the ship back to harbor.

Object (Line 20) - The speaker declares that the ship has returned to harbor “with object won.” Here the word “object” refers to the ship’s goal or objective. By saying that the ship was “won” its “object,” the speaker means that the ship has achieved the goal for which it set out.

FORM, METER, & RHYME

FORM

“O Captain! My Captain!” is a ballad written in three eight-line stanzas, or octaves. However, it might be more accurate to assert that each stanza contains *two* formally distinct quatrains, or groups of four lines. This is because the first four lines and the last four lines of each stanza look very different in formal terms.

In each stanza, the first four lines are longer, written in an iambic meter, and follow an AABB rhyme scheme. By contrast, the succeeding four lines are shorter, tend to deviate from the iambic meter of the preceding lines, and follow a CDED rhyme scheme.

This formal difference is no accident, since it mirrors the thematic and emotional shifts implicit in the transition from one quatrain to another. Each stanza begins with vivid descriptions of scenes of communal rejoicing as the crowds celebrate the safe return of the ship to harbor. However, the stanza then redirects attention to the speaker’s grief at the loss of his “captain,” President Lincoln, who has died in his moment of triumph. In this way, the formal transformation undergone by each stanza mirrors the juxtaposition between victory and loss that is central to the poem’s emotional landscape.

METER

"O Captain! My Captain!" is written in iambic meter (unstressed-stressed). However, this is a general rather than a strict rule, since many lines are irregular. The poem's first line, for instance, follows this stressed/unstressed pattern for the most part yet has a trochee (stressed-unstressed) in its third foot:

> O Cap- | tain! my | Cap tain! | our fear- | ful trip | is done,

Depending on how you read the line, you could also scan this as two amphibrachs, a very rare metrical foot that follows an unstressed-stressed-unstressed pattern (da-DUM-da):

> O Cap tain! | my Cap tain!

Either way, the emphasis on the start of the word "Captain"

seems appropriate given the importance of this figure in the poem. Even so the first four lines of the first stanza follow a mostly regular iambic meter. In the fifth line, however, there doesn't seem to be any discernible meter whatsoever. Instead, all that's clear is the repeated stress on the word "heart," a moment of epizeuxis and emphasis that mimics the beating of a heart itself:

> But O heart! heart! heart!

Also note the trochees and spondees (stressed-stressed) that interrupt the iambic meter of lines 9 and 10:

> O Cap- | tain! my | Captain! | rise up |and hear |the bells;
> Rise up | —for you | the flag | is flung |—for you | the bugle trills,

The repeated spondees of "rise up" add emphasis to the phrase, suggesting just how desperately the speaker wants the Captain to live, to be able to take in the great victory all around him. In this sense, although the speaker generally uses a regular iambic meter, the poem sometimes breaks out of meter entirely in moments like these of particular drama or exclamation, as when the speaker experiences a powerful swelling of emotion.

RHYME SCHEME

The poem is written with regular end rhymes. Some of these are slant rhymes ("bells" and "trills," for example) while others are perfect rhymes ("done" and "won"). However, the rhyme shifts halfway through each "octave," or stanza of eight lines. This is because the first four lines of each stanza are made up of rhyming couplets, but the last four lines are not. So in each stanza, the first four lines follow this rhyme scheme:

> AABB

The second quatrain, however, has a different, more varied rhyme scheme:

> CDED

The shift in the rhyme scheme between the first and second half of each stanza might be said to mirror the poem's shift in focus from the celebrations of cheering crowds to the speaker's melancholy and grief. The occasional internal rhymes in the initial quatrains ("near" and "hear" in line 3, "trip and "ship" in line 20) add to that sense of joy and celebration. The less regular rhyme scheme of the second quatrains, meanwhile, gives the poem a less polished and more chaotic energy, suggestive of the powerful emotions articulated by the speaker.

It's also worth noting that the poem maintains some patterns of rhyme *between* stanzas, but does not do so for all the rhymes. In particular, all of the D rhymes in each stanza are words that end in an "ed" sound — they all rhyme together across the three stanzas. That is not true for any of the other rhymes. The D rhymes all share this trait because every stanza ends on the word "dead," and so this insistent rhyming with "dead" in each stanza serves to drive home the tragedy of Lincoln's death.

SPEAKER

The speaker of "O Captain! My Captain!" seems to be an ordinary crew member of the ship described in the poem—a ship that stands in, metaphorically, for the United States—since he describes President Lincoln as "my captain." Though the speaker is not gendered in the poem, it's likely that he is a man given that, at the time of the poem's writing, a ship's crew would be made up only of men. Of course, poems are not always beholden to their context, and it is entirely possible to interpret the speaker's gender otherwise!

In any case, at first this speaker appears as a kind of spokesperson for the crowds who cheer the return of the ship, noting that "our fearful trip is done" and "the prize we sought is won." Soon, however, the poem opens up a gap between the speaker and the celebrations around him. While the people are "exulting" or celebrating, the speaker fixates on the drops of blood on the deck of the ship and expresses his grief that the captain has "fallen cold and dead" even at the height of his triumph.

The speaker's sense of emotional isolation deepens throughout the poem. While the crowds present bouquets and victory wreaths, the speaker desperately tries to revive his fallen captain by lifting his head and shaking him awake. There seems to be no way for the speaker to share the rejoicing of those around him. In the poem's final lines, as the crowd cheers and the bells ring, the speaker remains on the ship by his captain's dead body, mourning the loss of his leader.

SETTING

The poem is set in a port at which a ship has just returned from a long and perilous sea journey. Although the time and place are not specified, the poem is an extended metaphor that likens the "captain" of the title to President Abraham Lincoln, the ship to the United States, and the port to the victory of the Union in the American Civil War. In this sense, it might be said that the poem is really set in the northeast United States in the 1860s, around the time it was written.

CONTEXT

LITERARY CONTEXT

Walt Whitman is one of the most significant figures in the history of American poetry. His critical reputation is mostly the

legacy of his collection *Leaves of Grass* (1855), which he revised many times throughout his life. His poems often experiment with form—they rarely rhyme or follow convention meter schemes—and explore themes of sexuality and erotic experience, which in fact led Whitman's employer at the civil service to accuse him of obscenity. In this sense, Whitman broke with many of the traditions of American poetry that came before him. For instance, the earlier work of the "Fireside Poets," such as Henry Wadsworth Longfellow and William Cullen Bryant, emphasized metrical regularity and pastoral or nationalist themes, such as odes to the American countryside.

"O Captain! My Captain!" has been the site of heated critical controversy because it doesn't fit into an idea of Whitman's poetry derived from *Leaves of Grass*. In some ways it is more like the conventional poetry of the Fireside Poets, since it is metrically regular, short, and patriotic. As a result, modern critics have often argued that the poem is aesthetically inferior to Whitman's later, more experimental poetry, citing Whitman's own statement later in life that he wished he had never written it.

At the same time, however, proponents of the poem have suggested that the poem's accessible and regular language and meter offers a vehicle through which to express powerful emotions in a controlled form. The poem was enormously popular when it was first published and is still regularly memorized and recited, suggesting that it offered a way for the American people to express their collective grief.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

"O Captain! My Captain!" was written in the immediate aftermath of the American Civil War (1861-1865), the four-year conflict between the Northern and Southern states. After decades of tensions over the issues of slavery and states' rights, eleven Southern states declared independence from the Union in the early 1860s. The war exacted an enormous death toll, and Civil War battles remain some of the bloodiest days in American history, in terms of the cost to American lives. Finally, at the end of a long and grinding struggle that left the Union victorious, President Lincoln was assassinated by John Wilkes Booth, a Confederate partisan, in 1865.

The poem offers an extended metaphor for the political situation in 1865. The "captain" is President Lincoln, the ship stands in for the United States, and the port to which the ship is returning represents the Union's victory in the Civil War. Just as President Lincoln was assassinated at the war's end, the caption of the poem's title falls "cold and dead" in the moment of his triumph.

MORE RESOURCES

EXTERNAL RESOURCES

- Whitman Out Loud — For audio recordings of the poem, check out the free downloadable selection from LibriVox. (https://librivox.org/search?title=O+Captain!+My+Captain!&author=Whitman&rea
- Poetry and the Mediation of Value: Whitman on Lincoln — This is the text of a lecture by Professor Helen Vendler, a famous authority on American and British poetry. Although it is an academic lecture, it is written in an accessible style. (https://quod.lib.umich.edu/cgi/t/text/text-idx?cc=mqr;c=mqr;c=mqrarchive;idno=act2080.0039.101;g=m
- Two Worlds of Mourning: Walt Whitman and Abraham Lincoln's Death — This resource from the National Portrait Gallery dives in to the relationship between Walt Whitman and the subject of his elegy, President Abraham Lincoln. ()
- Clip from Dead Poets Society — "O Captain! My Captain!" remains a staple of the American school curriculum and appears frequently in popular culture. Watch a famous scene from the film Dead Poets Society in which students recite the beginning of the poem for their teacher, played by Robin Williams. (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ovcmhDwkANo)
- Encyclopedia.com Entry on "O Captain! My Captain!" — An extensive introduction to the poem and its context. The "Critical Overview" section is particularly comprehensive, including excerpts from the work of several prominent critics. (https://www.encyclopedia.com/arts/educational-magazines/o-captain-my-captain#G)

LITCHARTS ON OTHER WALT WHITMAN POEMS

- A Noiseless Patient Spider
- I Hear America Singing
- The Voice of the Rain
- When I Heard the Learn'd Astronomer

HOW TO CITE

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