

Detailed Analysis of O Captain! My Captain! by Walt Whitman

Stanza One

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.

In the first stanza of 'O Captain! My Captain!', the speaker shouts with sheer excitement to the 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, 'land ahoy', 'land ahoy' as

the ship is close by and people are seemingly exalted 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. The keel is a reference to a '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.

Thereafter, 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.

Stanza Two

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.

The sailor implores the now dead captain to rise from the dead. The act of talking to the dead is known as an apostrophe. The 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 some devices such as raising the flag in victory, holding flowers, and cheering for the captain. The crowd is getting restless, as anticipation rises 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 stand 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 Three

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.

In the last stanza of 'O Captain! My Captain!', 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 to 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 the 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 the entire American audience at large as the poem relates to the 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.