

**COYLE, William — The Poet and the President.** New York,  
The Odyssey Press, 1962, 334 pp.

One of the most frustrating aspects of teaching American Literature in Brazil is, perhaps, the difficulty in having access to an extensive bibliography. The high cost of American books make it difficult for students and teachers to carry out thorough programs of study in the field.

The present work, **The Poet and the President**, prepared and edited by Professor William Coyle, a former Fulbright Professor in American Literature at the University of São Paulo presents a possible solution. Through the presentation of a "case", that is — the relationship, biographical and artistic, between the American poet, Walt Whitman, and the sixteenth president of the United States, Abraham Lincoln, the author compiles together in one volume all the extant bibliographical material on that theme.

Foremost are the four poems elicited by Lincoln's assassination. Those are: "When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloomed", "Oh Captain, My Captain", "Hushed Be the Camps To-Day" and "This Dust Was Once the Man".

Even before Lincoln's assassination, Whitman held a great admiration for the man. In section four, entitled "Whitman and Lincoln", he paints this vivid picture of the troubled president. The passage is taken from **Specimen Days**:

I see the President almost every day, as I happen to live where he passes to or from his lodgings out of town. ...I saw the President in the face fully, as they were moving slowly, and his look, though abstracted, happen'd to be directed steadily in my eye. ... None of the artists or pictures have caught the deep, though indirect expression of this man's face. There's something else there. One of the great portrait painters of two or three centuries ago is needed (p. 72).

Walt Whitman's admiration for Abraham Lincoln led him to

believe that the President had on two differed occasions been complementary to his person. One was Lincoln's supposedly favourable comment on Whitman's book, *Leaves of Grass*. The other, Lincoln's apparent remark on seeing Whitman passing outside of his window, "There Goes a Man". Unfortunately, through the articles presented by Professor Coyle on the issue, it seems clear that President Lincoln never read Whitman's poems nor uttered the flattering remark.

After the assassination Walt Whitman manifested his bereavement for the lost leader, first through lectures and later through the writing of immortal poems. It is curious to note that in those public lectures Whitman called for a great poet who would rise to the occasion and write the American national epic on the martyred president. Although he didn't write an epic, he himself was the poet he sought after. "When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloomed", stands as a final tribute to a great man. One hundred years after the assassination — almost to the day — Whitman's achievement in that poem is finally understood. As Professor Coyle shows, through the selections of articles dealing with an analysis of the poem, only in the last twenty years has it been duly evaluated.

Primarily destined to a student audience, Professor Coyle's book, *The Poet and the President*, encloses variant readings to the four poems, as well as a definition of useful literary terms, such as — **free verse symbol and parallelism**. Other poetic examples of elegy are given in section seven. A guide to term paper techniques and library use norms are given in appendix.

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