next to of course god america i

POEM TEXT

"next to of course god america i
love you land of the pilgrims' and so forth oh
say can you see by the dawn's early my
country 'tis of centuries come and go
and are no more what of it we should worry
in every language even deafanddumb
thy sons acclaim your glorious name by gorry
by jingo by gee by gosh by gum
why talk of beauty what could be more beaut-
iful than these heroic happy dead
who rushed like lions to the roaring slaughter
they did not stop to think they died instead
then shall the voice of liberty be mute?"

He spoke. And drank rapidly a glass of water

SUMMARY

The poem begins by quoting an unidentified speaker who claims to love America more than anything else, except, of course, for God. The speaker gushes about how America was founded by the Pilgrims and quotes the beginning of the U.S. national anthem, before abruptly transitioning into lyrics taken from "America (My Country 'Tis of Thee)." Without completing this quotation, though, the speaker breaks off and notes that time passes no matter what and that centuries always come to an end—but this, the speaker says, isn't worth worrying about. The speaker then upholds that people should praise the glory of America in whatever terms suit them. To illustrate this, the speaker spouts off a mixture of gibberish and colloquial phrases meant to illustrate just how much the speaker loves America. The speaker then asserts that the most beautiful thing possible is dying willingly and happily for one's country in battle, which is what young soldiers have done by charging into violent combat without stopping to think about it. Instead of thinking, the speaker says, these soldiers simply went ahead and died, and the speaker wonders if America's spirit of freedom and liberty has died along with them.

At this point, the unidentified speaker's quotation ends and another person enters the poem. Acting as a narrator, this new person explains that, after this long speech, the first speaker falls silent and quickly drinks a glass of water.

THEMES

THE DANGERS OF EXCESSIVE PATRIOTISM

"next to of course god america i" is an anti-war poem that touches on the dangers of empty patriotism. The poem's main speaker—who seems to be addressing a crowd or audience of some sort—imitates the gung-ho, unflinching patriotism that was popular in the United States during and after World War I, but this speech is filled with shallow, rambling clichés and empty platitudes. As a result, the poem becomes a parody of patriotism itself, framing certain forms of national pride as misguided and thoughtless. More specifically, the poem suggests that mindless patriotism often leads to violence, since it can fuel enthusiasm for war.

The poem's cynical view of patriotism is illustrated by the lack of substance in the speaker's speech about America. The speaker rapidly quotes the national anthem and then transitions into the patriotic song "America (My Country 'Tis of Thee)" without actually dwelling on the lyrics of either song. Even though these songs are usually intended to inspire Americans, the offhanded way that the speaker references them makes them seem insignificant and hollow, as if they've been quoted so many times that they've completely lost their meaning.

However, it's unclear whether the speaker is *purposefully* making fun of the downsides of patriotism. On the one hand, the speaker's tone seems sarcastic and deliberately ridiculous, as made evident by the lines, "thy sons acclaim your glorious name by gorry / by jingo by gee by gosh by gum." The use of these absurd words suggests that the speaker wants to humorously mimic the way people talk when they become excessive about patriotism.

On the other hand, though, it's also possible that the speaker actually *is* an excessively patriotic person. If this is the case, then the poem implies that such adamantly patriotic beliefs are capable of keeping people from recognizing the flaws in their own thinking or speaking.

Regardless of whether the speaker is self-aware, the poem implies that vague patriotic ideals are dangerous because they can overshadow more important matters. When the speaker describes the "heroic happy dead" soldiers who rush off into battle without a further thought, readers are invited to consider the fact that national pride encourages people to idealize the idea of dying for their country—they are "happy" because the act of dying in battle is seen as "heroic" and patriotic. Furthermore, the speaker calls this sacrifice

"beautiful," indicating that intense patriotism can skew the way people view otherwise horrific things. After all, there is nothing "beautiful" about dying a violent death, but the speaker's comment shows that intense patriotism ultimately romanticizes the act of dying without thinking twice.

In this way, the gung-ho, unwavering patriotism that the speaker models is quite powerful—so powerful that it can keep people from thinking for themselves. Ironically, then, it becomes clear that extreme and unquestioned forms of patriotism can actually interfere with the very freedom of thought that is supposedly at the heart of American life.

Where this theme appears in the poem:

- Lines 1-14

LINE-BY-LINE ANALYSIS

LINES 1-2

"next to of course god america i
love you land of the pilgrims' and so forth

The poem begins with quotation marks, indicating that the speaker is *actually* speaking aloud in this moment. Of course, the context of the poem isn't clear yet, but it's still worth noting that the speaker seems to be delivering some kind of speech or public rant—a fact that affects the way readers approach the poem.

The speaker announces a deep love of America, one that is only rivaled by the speaker's love of God. As a way of demonstrating this love, the speaker waxes patriotically about how the country is the "land of the pilgrims," alluding and paying tribute to the nation's history in a way that sounds respectful and moving while also quoting a line from the patriotic song "America (My Country, 'Tis of Thee)."

However, the speaker's actual attitude toward the United States is difficult to discern. Although the things the speaker says in these first two lines seem to set forth a strong sense of patriotism, the *way* the speaker says them is unemotional and detached. To that end, the speaker uses certain colloquial phrases that make these lines sound insincere:

"next to **of course** god america i
love you land of the pilgrims' **and so forth**

The phrases "of course" and "and so forth" are informal, especially compared to the grand pronouncements the speaker makes about the United States. By working these casual phrases into these lines, then, the speaker deflates the overall patriotic tone. In fact, it's possible that the speaker is speaking sarcastically, using verbal irony to imply that patriotic platitudes lack substance. Regardless of whether the speaker is self-aware, though, the poem frames these patriotic phrases as clichés that no longer carry the significance they once had.

The opening two lines also establish the poem's gesture toward iambic pentameter. This is a meter in which each line consists of five iambs, metrical feet made up of an unstressed syllable followed by a stressed syllable (da-DUM). Iambic pentameter is commonly found in sonnets, but the version of it that appears in "next to of course god america i" is highly irregular. To that end, the poem's adherence to iambic pentameter has more to do with the fact that most of its lines are roughly 10 syllables than anything else, since very few of its lines actually establish a consistent iambic rhythm. Indeed, the first line only includes one iamb:

"next to | of course | god a- | meri- | ca i

The first foot of this line ("next to") is a trochee, meaning that it contains a stressed syllable followed by an unstressed syllable. In fact, *every* foot except the second one ("of course," which is an iamb) is a trochee. With this in mind, it's quite clear that the poem will not strictly adhere to the iambic pentameter that is usually found in sonnets, instead using an unwieldy and unpredictable version that sounds more like free verse.

LINES 2-5

oh
say can you see by the dawn's early my
country 'tis of centuries come and go
and are no more what of it we should worry

Continuing to speak patriotically (or to present a satire of patriotism), the speaker quotes the U.S. national anthem, saying, "oh / say can you see by the dawn's early." Before finishing this phrase, though, the speaker suddenly transitions into a quote from yet another patriotic song, this time briefly alluding to "America (My Country, 'Tis of Thee)," which the speaker has already quoted in line 2 ("love you [...] forth oh"). However, the speaker only quotes a snippet of the song, saying, "my / country 'tis of" before once again switching tracks, going on to point out that "centuries come and go."

The way these phrases run together is nonsensical, but the fact that the speaker quotes these patriotic songs in this piecemeal way is worth paying attention to. The fragmented nature of these references ultimately makes them sound meaningless and hollow. Indeed, the speaker's use of patriotic lyrics doesn't sound moving or inspiring at all; it sounds empty and totally thoughtless. In fact, it's almost as if the speaker can't keep these two songs straight, mistakenly thinking they're the same.

It is, of course, possible that the speaker is *purposefully* using verbal irony to *mock* excessive displays of patriotism. Conversely, it's also possible that the speaker truly thinks these phrases are deeply meaningful and is completely unaware of how the tone in this section sounds dismissive and empty.

After quoting the anthem and "America (My Country, 'Tis of Thee)," the speaker says that centuries "come and go" and that people shouldn't spend time worrying about the passage of time. How this relates to what the speaker has just been saying about the United States isn't exactly clear, though this nod to history aligns with the earlier mention of the pilgrims.

With this in mind, it seems likely that the speaker wants to acknowledge the nation's past but doesn't want to dwell on it. Instead, the speaker believes that history is "no more" and that there's nothing about this particular fact that should make people "worry." In turn, readers see that the speaker sets forth an odd form of patriotism, one that only acknowledges the country's history in a superficial, fleeting way.

Overall, the speaker's rapid pace, seemingly short attention span, and jumbled phrasing is so difficult to follow that the poem itself is almost meaningless. In this sense, then, the lack of concrete meaning in the speaker's words reflects the fact that excessively patriotic language often doesn't have much substance and is frequently incoherent.

The speaker's odd use of enjambment emphasizes this incoherence, making it even harder to find meaning in these lines. For instance, the moment in which the speaker goes from quoting the national anthem to quoting "America (My Country, 'Tis of Thee)" is worth considering because of the way the speaker enjambs the two quotations:

> [...] oh
> say can you see by the dawn's early my
> country 'tis of centuries come and go

Both of the quoted lyrics ("oh / say can you see by the dawn's early" and "my / country 'tis of") begin at the end of a line and then carry on into the next line. For this reason, it's not immediately clear what, exactly, is happening when the speaker begins to quote "America (My Country, 'Tis of Thee)," since it seems like the word "my" is connected to "oh / say can you see by the dawn's early." It is this kind of enjambment, though, that defines the poem, which skips quickly from one thought to the next, ultimately making it challenging for readers to understand what the speaker is saying.

LINES 6-8

> *in every language even deafanddumb*
> *thy sons acclaim your glorious name by gorry*
> *by jingo by gee by gosh by gum*

In lines 6 through 8 ("in every language [...] gosh by gum"), the speaker maintains that people should celebrate the United States by praising its "glorious name" using whatever language seems appropriate. In other words, the speaker points out that there are many ways to speak patriotically—what matters most, it seems, is that people find a way to express appreciation and fondness for the country.

In fact, the speaker even implies that *words* aren't completely necessary when it comes to proving one's patriotism! This is made clear by the speaker's assertion that patriotism can be expressed "in every language even deafanddumb."

The term "deafanddumb" is no longer an acceptable way of describing people who cannot hear or speak, but its appearance in the poem implies that the speaker isn't interested in getting hung up on the precise way that people announce their patriotism. According to the speaker, it's possible to demonstrate national pride without even using verbal language.

This, in turn, makes sense of the fact that the speaker's own words aren't very effective; after all, the speaker apparently doesn't place very much importance on language, which is why the poem contains so many patriotic expressions that feel empty of true meaning.

Whether knowingly or not, then, the speaker once again models what it looks like to subscribe to an excessive form of patriotism that is ultimately hollow and meaningless. In this moment, the speaker implies that *any* kind of patriotic statement is valuable and worthy of respect—an idea that is obviously absurd, since so many patriotic expressions have become commonplace and unremarkable. And as if the lazy patriotic statements that have appeared throughout the poem haven't already made this clear, the speaker strings together a number of colloquial phrases that essentially sound like gibberish, saying:

> thy sons acclaim your glorious name by gorry
> by jingo by gee by gosh by gum

The word "gorry" is, for the most part, meaningless, but some readers view it as a deliberate misspelling of "golly." The colloquial phrase "by golly" is an inoffensive substitute for the more blasphemous "by God." The fact that the speaker doesn't even say "golly," though, suggests that the speaker is making such an effort to remain inoffensive that the poem devolves into meaninglessness.

And yet, not every word in line 8 ("by jingo [...] by gum") is meaningless. In fact, the word "jingo" refers to jingoism, which is the adamant support of extreme pro-war patriotism. In this moment, then, the poem mockingly criticizes the American tendency to become gung-ho about national pride in order to justify violence and war.

When the speaker continues by saying "by gee by gosh by gum," the poem begins to sound even more absurd, as if the speaker has gotten carried away and is more interested in the alliterative repetition of the /j/ and /g/ sounds than in the actual *meaning* of the words. This, it seems, is why the speaker isn't all that focused on how people express their patriotism. Instead, the speaker is interested in superficial assertions of national

pride, as if the mere *act* of declaring one's patriotism is more important than the actual meaning of these declarations.

LINES 9-11

why talk of beauty what could be more beaut-
iful than these heroic happy dead
who rushed like lions to the roaring slaughter

In yet another abrupt transition, the speaker shifts from considering patriotic language to considering the nature of beauty. More specifically, the speaker argues that there's nothing more beautiful than soldiers who have willingly died for their country in battle. This statement aligns with the speaker's previous reference to jingoism, which is a form of extreme patriotism based on an aggressively pro-war mentality.

The fact that the speaker uses the term "heroic happy dead" to describe the soldiers who have sacrificed their lives for their country is significant, since it spotlights the ways in which extreme patriotism glorifies and romanticizes dying in battle. Putting this mentality on display, the speaker uses a simile to compare these soldiers to lions who sprint toward a "roaring slaughter." This image is particularly evocative, since lions are often seen as strong, respected animals. In turn, the speaker portrays soldiers who die in battle as heroes who deserve respect.

However, there is yet another sense of irony in this moment, since the speaker refers to the "heroic happy dead" soldiers as "beautiful." Indeed, it's hard to believe that anyone would ever think that dying a violent death is "beautiful." And yet, the speaker claims that there's *nothing* more beautiful than this.

If the speaker is purposefully mocking excessive patriotism, then this idea is stated sarcastically. If, on the other hand, the speaker actually believes this, then the poem presents the speaker as an example of someone whose general perception has been skewed by patriotic platitudes. Either way, the speaker models the dangers of patriotism and jingoism, both of which idealize violence and death.

These lines are particularly alliterative, as the speaker repeats two different alliterative sounds per line. Indeed, line 9 emphasizes both the /w/ and the /b/ sound:

> why talk of beauty what could be more beaut-

Following this, the speaker uses the /th/ and /h/ sounds in line 10:

> iful than these heroic happy dead

Finally, the speaker repeats the /r/ and /l/ sounds in line 11:

> who rushed like lions to the roaring slaughter

By wheeling through so many alliterative sounds, the speaker gives these lines a musical quality, ultimately making the words sound pleasant and song-like. And this pleasing sound aligns with the general idea that dying in battle is beautiful and commendable. To further accentuate this dynamic, the speaker also uses assonance by repeating the long /ee/ sound:

> why talk of beauty what could be more beaut-
> iful than these heroic happy dead

Like the alliteration, this assonance enhances the sound of these lines, creating a nice sense of musicality. Even though the speaker is talking about violence and death, then, the overall tone remains light and satisfying.

This also aligns with the polyptoton the speaker uses by placing the words "beauty" and "beautiful" in close proximity to each other, thereby stressing the fact that excessively patriotic people actually believe something as ugly as a violent death on a battlefield is beautiful.

LINES 12-13

they did not stop to think they died instead
then shall the voice of liberty be mute?"

The speaker continues in these lines to talk about the "heroic happy dead" soldiers who rush into battle like lions. Having already referred to these soldiers as "beautiful," the speaker adds that they don't even stop to fully consider what, exactly, they're doing. Instead, they simply run into battle without a second thought. This, in turn, implies that patriotism can prevent people from thinking for themselves, ultimately distracting them with gung-ho ideas about national pride.

This is rather tragic. If people are going to unquestioningly give their lives in the name of their country, one would think they would want to be sure they're doing so for a good reason. And yet, the wholehearted patriotism of these soldiers seems to prevent them from thinking this way, since it encourages them to act on behalf of their country without second-guessing the point or value of dying in battle. In this way, patriotism prevents people from thinking freely and independently.

In keeping with this, the speaker asks in the poem's second-to-last line, "then shall the voice of liberty be mute?" This question can be interpreted in two different ways, depending on how readers view the speaker's outlook:

1. If the speaker is purposefully calling attention to the flaws of patriotism, then this is a rhetorical question that highlights the ways in which patriotism makes it hard to think for oneself. Under this interpretation, the soldiers who rush off into battle actually *aren't* exercising the kind of liberty that patriotism supposedly champions in the first place, since they've been misled by empty rhetoric designed to

inspire unquestioning allegiance to the country. If this is case, then the very freedom and liberty that patriotism is supposed to uplift has fallen "mute."
2. If the speaker actually *is* patriotic, then this question about liberty expresses a genuine concern—namely, that the patriotic ideals these soldiers fought for have died along with the soldiers themselves.

Setting aside the implications of the speaker's question, it's worth noting the alliteration of the /th/ sound in line 12:

they did not stop to think they died instead

This recurring /th/ sound (voiced and unvoiced) pairs nicely with the blunter, more prominent consonance created by the repeated /d/ sound, as well as the sibilant hissing of the /s/ sound and the bite of the /t/ sound:

they did not stop to think they died instead

These poetic devices combine to create a line that sounds quite rich and, therefore, impassioned—an effect that aligns with the speaker's quick pace and messy, unorganized use of meter. Indeed, the speaker's tone is passionate and even somewhat belligerent, and the use of alliteration and consonance only emphasizes these qualities.

LINE 14

He spoke. And drank rapidly a glass of water

At this point, another person enters the poem. This person serves as a narrator of sorts, saying, "He spoke. And drank rapidly a glass of water." This presents the original speaker as someone who has been on a long rant and who has just now fallen silent.

The fact that there are two speakers in this poem—one who rants about patriotism and one who recounts this rant in quotation marks—is significant because it distances the second speaker from the excessively patriotic ideas that the first speaker sets forth. As a result, the second speaker is able to give readers a new perspective of the first speaker, portraying this person as somebody who has spoken so passionately that it's now necessary to guzzle a glass of water.

This is either because the first speaker is nervous about what has just been said (perhaps because the patriotic remarks were actually said sarcastically), or because the first speaker believes what has been said so strongly that the mere effort of expressing such ideas has proved exhausting.

One thing that separates the speakers from each other is the measured way that the second person speaks in this line. Instead of pushing phrases together, the second speaker separates two sentences with a period, something the first speaker never does. This, in turn, makes the second speaker sound comparatively calm, thereby accentuating the first speaker's enthusiasm.

The final line is also fairly assonant, as the speaker repeats the long /ee/ sound along with the /ah/ sound:

He spoke. And drank rapidly a glass of water

This assonance ties the words together, giving the line a sound of consistency and cohesion that the rest of the poem often lacks. Furthermore, the speaker repeats the consonant /k/ sound and the sibilant /s/ sound:

He spoke. And drank rapidly a glass of water

By pairing the softness of the /s/ sound with the harsher /k/ sound, the speaker emphasizes the words "spoke," "drank," and "glass." And though the sentiment the speaker expresses is simple, its straightforwardness is what sets it apart from the rest of the poem. In this way, the speaker's use of consonance to call attention to these simple, uncomplicated words is especially significant, since it accentuates the second speaker's levelheadedness, which stands in stark contrast to the first speaker's mania and use of impassioned gibberish.

SYMBOLS

THE SPEAKER'S THIRST

On the most basic level, the speaker's thirst after ranting about patriotism indicates that something about the speech itself has exhausted the speaker, who tries to recover by drinking deeply. This, in turn, represents the speaker's intense commitment to this particular topic.

However, this act of drinking water doesn't clarify the exact dynamic surrounding the speaker's beliefs. On the one hand, it's possible that the act of drinking symbolizes a certain regret on the speaker's behalf, as if the speaker has just realized that this rant is controversial because it uses irony and sarcasm to challenge patriotic ways of thinking. On the other hand, though, it's also possible that the act of drinking merely symbolizes that the speaker believes in what has just been said so intensely that the mere process of saying it has completely drained the speaker of energy.

As it stands, it's quite difficult to say which of these two interpretations is correct. As a result, the speaker's intense thirst functions as a simple symbol of how riled up people often get when discussing such politically charged topics.

Where this symbol appears in the poem:

- **Line 14:** "drank rapidly a glass of water"

POETIC DEVICES

ALLITERATION

One of the poem's most prominent features is the speaker's use of alliteration, which appears in almost every line. The alliterative moments become particularly prominent when the intensity of the speaker's words increases.

At first, the speaker uses alliteration consistently but somewhat sparingly, repeating roughly one alliterative sound per line. For instance, lines 2 through 4 ("love you land ... come and go") each contain one alliterative repetition; line 2 features the /l/ sound, line 3 features the sibilant /s/ sound, and line 4 features the /k/ sound:

> love you land of the pilgrims' and so forth oh
> say can you see by the dawn's early my
> country 'tis of centuries come and go

Using alliteration, the speaker connects and emphasizes important words, especially in line 2, which spotlights the words "love" and "land." In this way, alliteration helps the speaker underline words that exaggerate the poem's intensely patriotic tone.

In other moments, the speaker's use of alliteration creates a feeling of intensity that reflects the speaker's passion (regardless of whether this passion is actually sincere). For example, lines 9 through 11 ("why talk of ... the roaring slaughter") are particularly alliterative, repeating the /w/, /b/, /th/, /h/, /r/, and /l/ sounds:

> why talk of beauty what could be more beaut-
> iful than these heroic happy dead
> who rushed like lions to the roaring slaughter

By infusing each line with so much alliteration, the speaker ties certain words to each other while also creating a fairly arresting overall sound that aligns with the subject at hand. Indeed, the speaker describes soldiers rushing to their death in battle, so it makes sense that these lines sound particularly intense. In keeping with this, alliteration helps the speaker set forth the kind of tone that an impassioned American patriot would most likely use when talking about war and the country.

Where Alliteration appears in the poem:

- **Line 2:** "love," "land"
- **Line 3:** "say," "see"
- **Line 4:** "country," "come"
- **Line 5:** "what," "we," "worry"
- **Line 7:** "glorious," "gorry"
- **Line 8:** "jingo," "gee," "gosh," "gum"
- **Line 9:** "why," "beauty," "what," "beaut"
- **Line 10:** "than," "these," "heroic," "happy"
- **Line 11:** "rushed," "like," "lions," "roaring"
- **Line 12:** "they," "did," "think," "they," "died"
- **Line 13:** "then," "the"

ALLUSION

The speaker makes several allusions throughout the poem. For the most part, these allusions function as off-handed references to common patriotic songs. This is made evident early on in the poem, when the speaker quotes fragments from both the U.S. national anthem ("The Star-Spangled Banner") and the song "America (My Country, 'Tis of Thee)."

The first of these quotes is somewhat less recognizable than the second two, since the speaker begins by alluding to a lesser-known lyric from "America (My Country, 'Tis of Thee)." Indeed, the phrase "land of the pilgrims'" that appears in line 2 is taken from "America (My Country, 'Tis of Thee)," though it's certainly not the song's most recognizable lyric. Nonetheless, it *does* appear in the song's opening verse, which goes like this:

> My country, ' tis of thee,
> Sweet land of liberty, of thee I sing;
> Land where my fathers died,
> Land of the pilgrims' pride,
> From every mountainside let freedom ring!

Instead of making this allusion obvious by quoting an entire line from the song, the speaker says "and so forth" after "land of the pilgrims,'" thereby making it difficult to pick up on the fact that this is indeed a reference to "America (My Country, 'Tis of Thee)."

Immediately after this allusion, the speaker transitions into yet *another* allusion, this time quoting the first line of "The Star-Spangled Banner," saying, "oh / say can you see by the dawn's early." Once again, though, the speaker stops short of actually quoting an entire line, instead abruptly transitioning back into lyrics from "America (My Country, 'Tis of Thee)" by saying, "my / country 'tis of." And yet, even this very recognizable phrase isn't quoted in full.

By alluding to these patriotic songs in such a fragmented, casual way, the speaker undermines their significance. Indeed, the speaker's tone actually sounds rather disinterested, as if the speaker can't be bothered to fully quote these songs. This, in turn, makes it seem as if the speaker doesn't actually believe in these patriotic sentiments. Or, alternatively, this casual tone makes it seem as if the speaker has quoted these songs so much that they've lost all meaning. In this way, then, the poem uses these allusions to present excessively patriotic language as over-used and, as a result, hollow.

Later in the poem, the speaker alludes to war by talking about soldiers who happily rushed into battle and gave their lives for their country. Given that E. E. Cummings fought in World War I (and that the poem was written less than a decade after the end of the war), it's logical to conclude that this mention of war is an allusion to World War I and the fact that many young soldiers gave their lives on the battlefield without hesitation.

Furthermore, line 13—"then shall the voice of liberty be mute?"—contains yet another possible allusion to "America (My Country, 'Tis of Thee)," since the song's first verse contains the line, "Sweet land of liberty, of thee I sing." Whereas the singer celebrates the U.S. by singing about liberty, then, the speaker of this poem worries that the very "voice of liberty" will perhaps fall silent.

Where Allusion appears in the poem:

- **Line 2:** "land of the pilgrims'"
- **Lines 2-3:** "oh / say can you see by the dawn's early"
- **Lines 3-4:** "my / country 'tis of"
- **Lines 10-12:** "heroic happy dead / who rushed like lions to the roaring slaughter / they did not stop to think they died instead"
- **Line 13:** "then shall the voice of liberty be mute?""

ASSONANCE

The speaker uses a fair amount of assonance throughout the poem. This reflects the speaker's passion, but also makes the poem sound a bit silly in spots—essentially undermining the seriousness of speaker's fervent patriotism. For example, note the long /o/ and /a/ sounds (plus /nd/ consonance), which lend the poem's opening a sort of sing-song cadence:

> love you land of the pilgrims' and so forth oh
> say can you see ...

Another particularly noticeable assonant sound that appears is the /ee/ sound, which runs from line 3 all the way to line 10. Look, for example, at the way this sound weaves its way through lines 3, 4, and 5:

> say can you see by the dawn's early my
> country 'tis of centuries come and go
> and are no more what of it we should worry

The /ee/ sound appears twice in each of these lines, thereby making them sound especially unified. In addition, the repetition of this assonant sound creates internal slant rhymes in each line, thereby enhancing the poem's musical qualities.

In other moments, the speaker's use of assonance is directly related to the use of simple repetition. This is the case in lines 7-9, when the speaker emphasizes the long /i/ sound by repeating the word "by":

> thy sons acclaim your glorious name by gorry
> by jingo by gee by gosh by gum
> why talk ...

The repetition of the word "by" creates quite a bit of assonance, as the long /i/ sound appears multiple times in quick succession, ultimately serving as a complement to the alliteration that can also be found in these lines. As a result, this part of the poem sounds especially rapid and sonically intense—an effect that matches the fact that the speaker has become quite passionate in this rant. In turn, assonance serves as away for the speaker to enhance the overall sound of the poem so that it reflects the fervent way that enthusiastic patriots often speak about their country (while also suggesting how ridiculous such patriotic proclamations sometimes sound).

Where Assonance appears in the poem:

- **Line 2:** "land," "and," "so," "oh"
- **Line 3:** "can," "see," "early"
- **Line 4:** "centuries," "go"
- **Line 5:** "no," "we," "worry"
- **Line 6:** "every," "even," "deafanddumb"
- **Line 7:** "thy," "sons," "glorious," "by," "gorry"
- **Line 8:** "by," "by," "gee," "by," "gosh," "by"
- **Line 9:** "why," "talk," "beauty," "be"
- **Line 10:** "these," "happy"
- **Line 11:** "like," "lions"
- **Line 12:** "not," "stop"
- **Line 13:** "liberty," "be"
- **Line 14:** "He," "rapidly," "glass"

CONSONANCE

Throughout the poem, the speaker combines consonance with other poetic devices like alliteration and sibilance to increase the intensity of the speaker's language. As with those other sonic devices, consonance essentially turns up the volume of the poem, reflecting (and, at the same time, mocking) the speaker's seeming passion. The speaker is loud and forceful, but not actually saying anything of substance.

For instance, lines 2 and 3 include the consonant /l/ and /n/ sounds:

> love you land of the pilgrims' and so forth oh
> say can you see by the dawn's early my

This is a good example of how the speaker's use of consonance overlaps with the use of alliteration, since the /l/ sound repeats at the beginning of "love" and "land" but then reappears in the words "pilgrims" and "early." In this way, the speaker combines alliteration and consonance to create an even more

prominently consonant sound.

In other lines, the speaker's use of consonance is even more intense. Indeed, line 12 features a number of consonant sounds, including the /th/, /d/, /n/, /s/, and /t/:

> they did not stop to think they died instead

Every single word in this includes some kind of consonance, helping the line ring out all the more emphatically for the reader. All in all, the poem's intense consonance escalates its language in order to convey the patriotic speaker's excitability, passion, and fervor.

Where Consonance appears in the poem:

- **Line 2:** "love," "land," "pilgrims," "so"
- **Line 3:** "say," "can," "see," "dawn's"
- **Line 4:** "country," "'tis," "centuries," "come," "and"
- **Line 5:** "and," "are," "no," "more," "what," "we," "worry"
- **Line 6:** "every," "even," "deafanddumb"
- **Line 7:** "sons," "acclaim," "your," "glorious," "name," "gorry"
- **Line 8:** "by," "jingo," "by," "gee," "by," "gosh," "by," "gum"
- **Line 9:** "why," "beauty," "what," "be," "beaut"
- **Line 10:** "than," "these," "heroic," "happy," "dead"
- **Line 11:** "who," "rushed," "like," "lions," "roaring," "slaughter"
- **Line 12:** "they," "did," "not," "stop," "to," "think," "they," "died," "instead"
- **Line 13:** "then," "the"
- **Line 14:** "spoke," "drank," "rapidly," "glass"

DIACOPE

The speaker uses diacope in lines 7 and 8 by repeating the word "by" multiple times within the space of just a few words:

> thy sons acclaim your glorious name by gorry
> by jingo by gee by gosh by gum

This creates a rapid-fire effect, as the speaker rattles off words that mostly sound like gibberish when paired with one another. All of these pronouncements are more or less based on the expression "by God." However, the speaker purposefully *avoids* saying "by God," either because the expression is blasphemous or because the speaker wants to parody the lengths to which some people will go to avoid using offensive language. The result is that the speaker ends up repeating variations of this expression one after another, each phrase managing to sound almost more absurd than the last.

Indeed, the use of diacope in lines 7 and 8 give the poem a passionate, somewhat relentless sound. In turn, the tone becomes so over the top that it's hard to take the speaker's excessive patriotism seriously. In other words, this use of diacope emphasizes the speaker's breathless, overeager way of conveying the poem's central ideas, thereby making it hard to take the speaker seriously.

Where Diacope appears in the poem:

- **Line 7:** "by"
- **Line 8:** "by," "by," "by," "by"

ENJAMBMENT

The speaker of "next to of course god america i" uses enjambment to stretch certain phrases from one line to the next. Combined with the speaker's odd arrangement of words, lack of punctuation, and general tendency to jump quickly from one idea to the next, the instances of enjambment throughout the poem often make it somewhat challenging to figure out what, exactly, the speaker is trying to say. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the first four lines, since lines 1 through 3 are enjambed in unexpected ways:

> "next to of course god america i
> love you land of the pilgrims' and so forth oh
> say can you see by the dawn's early my
> country 'tis of centuries come and go

The enjambment in the above lines is unique because the speaker has a habit of starting a new phrase at the very end of a line. As a result, the first word of a new phrase dangles for a moment on its own, making it seem as if it belongs to the phrase that came before it—a confusing dynamic exacerbated by the fact that the speaker doesn't separate phrases with any kind of punctuation. It thus takes a moment to understand that the speaker has shifted from one clause to the next, as is the case when the speaker goes from saying the phrase "next to of course god" to saying the phrase "america i / love you." The speaker's use of enjambment actually makes it *harder* for readers to easily grasp the meaning of these words.

By enjambing phrases in such surprising ways, the speaker also creates a disjointed but rapid pace. In fact, it's almost as if the enjambed phrases are spilling over onto the next line, forcing the reader to work hard to keep up. This is especially evident in lines 9 and 10, when the speaker inserts a line break in the middle of a single word:

> why talk of beauty what could be more beaut-
> iful than these heroic happy dead

This use of enjambment is unique, ultimately aligning with the speaker's idiosyncratic syntax (that is, how the speaker arranges words within sentences) and generally odd way of expressing these patriotic ideas. Indeed, the enjambment in "next to of course god america i" subtly hints at the fact that the speaker's disorganized rant is totally ridiculous. In this sense, then, enjambment helps make it clear that the poem (or

perhaps the speaker) is *parodying* the way excessively patriotic people speak, ultimately rambling on in a manner that seems vaguely unhinged.

Where Enjambment appears in the poem:

- **Lines 1-2:** "i / love"
- **Lines 2-3:** "oh / say"
- **Lines 3-4:** "my / country"
- **Lines 6-7:** "deafanddumb / thy"
- **Lines 9-10:** "beaut- / iful"
- **Lines 10-11:** "dead / who"

RHETORICAL QUESTION

At the end of the long rant about patriotism and war, the speaker asks a rhetorical question:

> then shall the voice of liberty be mute?

The speaker has waxed poetic about how "beautiful" it is for soldiers to rush into battle without a second thought, thinking only of the "heroic" act of serving their country. However, it's not entirely clear whether the speaker's patriotic words are actually sincere. Indeed, it's possible that the speaker uses verbal irony to subtly suggest that it's misguided to unquestioningly welcome death in the name of one's country.

Either way, the question at the end of the speaker's rant is rhetorical, since the speaker uses it to make a persuasive point. If the speaker is being ironic, then the question essentially invites readers to consider the irony of dying for one's country without a further thought, since the very "liberty" that supposedly defines the U.S. should encourage people to think for themselves.

On the other hand, if the speaker is being sincere and truly believes these patriotic statements, then this question is a way for the speaker to voice a certain concern—namely, the concern that the kind of "liberty" embodied by these soldiers has died away with them.

Regardless of how readers interpret the speaker's overall tone, then, it's clear that the speaker's final question is rhetorical, since it's ultimately aimed at making a point instead of legitimately asking a question. As a result, the speaker's rant ends on an interesting note, one that invites readers to reflect on the true nature of "liberty." In this way, the speaker manages to place the idea of freedom—which is supposedly central to the entire American way of being—under extra scrutiny.

Where Rhetorical Question appears in the poem:

- **Line 13:** "then shall the voice of liberty be mute?""

IRONY

"next to of course god america i" is a fairly ironic poem, since it's quite clear that the excessively patriotic things the speaker says about the United States aren't meant to be taken seriously. After all, the speaker sets forth these ideas in a blatantly ridiculous way, using empty forms of gibberish ("by gorry / by jingo by gee by gosh by gum" and making outlandish suggestions (like that violent deaths on the battlefield are "beautiful"). The speaker's use of tired clichés and colloquialisms like "of course" and "and so forth" add to the poem's ironic tone, suggesting that the speaker does not actually treat the subject at hand with genuine thoughtfulness or respect.

Furthermore, the speaker's fragmented allusions to famous songs like the U.S. national anthem or "America (My Country, 'Tis of Thee)" come off as flippant and dismissive, as if the speaker can't be bothered to *fully* quote these songs. This, in turn, calls attention to the ways in which extremely patriotic sentiments have become overused and, as a result, empty of true significance or meaning. With this in mind, the speaker's enthusiastic tone while quoting such things comes to seem ridiculous and laughable.

In this sense, it's quite clear that the poem itself mocks intense patriotism. It's not so clear, however, whether the main speaker is in on the joke. Indeed, it's hard to say if the speaker delivers these words ironically or if the speaker is completely unaware and is simply an *example* of someone who truly believes these things.

Either way, the poem itself is certainly ironic because it sets forth seemingly positive ideas about patriotism as a way of exposing the flaws inherent to this kind of thinking. Whether the speaker is actively aware of this dynamic is up for debate, ultimately depending on how readers interpret the speaker's tone—which at times feels blatantly sarcastic but at other times seems overly earnest and sincere.

Where Irony appears in the poem:

- Lines 1-13

VOCABULARY

'Tis (Line 4) - An antiquated way of saying "it is" or, more simply, "is."

Deafanddumb (Line 6) - A made-up word used to describe people who cannot hear or speak. Because of the derogatory way it is used, this term would not be acceptable in contemporary times, especially since the word "dumb" is no longer considered an appropriate way to refer to people who are nonverbal.

Thy (Line 7) - An antiquated way of saying "your."

Acclaim (Line 7) - To enthusiastically praise or declare something in public.

Glorious (Line 7) - Beautiful, admirable, or triumphant.

Gorry (Line 7) - "Gorry" is not a word, but it is possibly a misspelling of the word "golly," which is most often used in the phrase "by golly"—an exclamation that people use instead of saying "by God."

Jingo (Line 8) - Jingoism is an aggressive, wholehearted form of patriotism that sets forth a pro-war approach to foreign policy. To be a "jingo" is to be somebody who subscribes to this outlook. The phrase "by jingo" is also sometimes used as an inoffensive exclamation that is similar to "by golly."

Gee (Line 8) - A mild, inoffensive exclamation that is similar to "golly" or "wow."

Gum (Line 8) - A thick but pliable substance. The word can also refer to the sensitive flesh surrounding teeth. In the poem, however, the word functions as little more than a meaningless piece of gibberish.

Slaughter (Line 11) - A slaughter is, in this case, a massacre of sorts in which many people kill each other. The word also refers to the butchering of animals.

Shall (Line 13) - An antiquated form of "will."

Liberty (Line 13) - Freedom; here, an allusion to America's founding ideals.

Mute (Line 13) - For something to be "mute" means that it has fallen silent.

FORM, METER, & RHYME

FORM

The poem loosely follows the conventions of the sonnet, at least insofar as it has 14 lines and a set rhyme scheme. Based on that rhyme scheme, the poem can also be broken into an eight-line octave (or two quatrains) followed by a six-line sestet (or two tercets). This is the basic form for a Petrarchan sonnet, though the rhyme scheme of those quatrains is actually more in line with that of a Shakespearean sonnet. Right away, then, the form isn't consistent.

The poem varies from the true sonnet form in several other ways too. First, the final line is separated from the rest of the poem. This strays from the standard organization of a sonnet, which is normally presented as a single stanza.

Furthermore, although most of the lines contain 10 syllables, this doesn't necessarily mean they're written in iambic pentameter, which is the meter commonly found in sonnets. Instead, the words flow rather freely, failing to fall into the unstressed-stress rhythmic pattern of iambic verse.

In these ways, "next to of course god america i" is a sonnet only in vague appearance, as if it has been organized to look like an approximation of a sonnet without actually adhering to the necessary formal constraints. The form itself, then—as a sonnet that falls apart upon close inspection—might be thought of as reflecting the shallow patriotism the poem mocks.

METER

At first glance, it might seem as if "next to of course god america i" is written in iambic pentameter, a meter in which each line contains of five iambs (five poetic feet consisting of an unstressed syllable followed by a stressed syllable, five da-DUMs). After all, the majority of the poem's lines contain roughly 10 syllables, which is often a good indicator that something is written in iambic pentameter.

Upon further inspection, though, it becomes clear that the poem lacks any kind of rhythmic consistency. Although its lines are all roughly the same length, the words that make up those lines create unpredictable rhythms that resemble the flowing nature of free verse more than any kind of true meter. As such, the poem gestures toward iambic pentameter without actually making use of it, much the same way the poem presents itself as a sonnet without adhering to the particular conventions of that form.

RHYME SCHEME

For the most part, the poem follows a rhyme scheme that isn't terribly out of the ordinary for a sonnet. This rhyme scheme can be mapped out like this:

ABAB CDCD EFGFE G

The first eight lines of the poem (known in sonnets as the octave) are fairly straightforward, adhering to a very standard rhyme scheme that is most common in the English (or Shakespearean) sonnet. The last six lines (known in sonnets as the sestet) deviate look more like those in a Petrarchan, or Italian, sonnet.

In this way, the poem maintains a musical sound despite its strange syntax, organization, and pacing. In fact, the rhyme scheme is perhaps the most consistent thing about the poem—a poem that not only includes an unpredictable meter, but also *two* unidentified speakers. Simply put, then, the rhyme scheme helps lend the poem a sense of cohesion that it might otherwise lack.

SPEAKER

There are two speakers in "next to of course god america i." The first speaker takes up 13 of the poem's 14 lines with a rant about patriotism and war. Despite the fact that this person is given so much time to speak, though, it's not immediately clear whether this initial speaker is being sincere or sarcastic.

On the one hand, it's possible that the speaker truly wants to praise the U.S. and speak patriotically about the honor of dying for one's country in battle. On the other hand, though, it's also possible that the speaker says these things as a way of using irony to highlight the absurdity of such thinking—an idea supported by the flippant, hollow way that the speaker often expresses patriotic ideas.

The second speaker only emerges in the poem's very last line, saying, "He spoke. And drank rapidly a glass of water." In turn, this person fills the position of a narrator who has just quoted the other speaker's words and is now showing readers how that first speaker behaves after having ranted so passionately. This, in turn, serves as a window into the first speaker's general way of being. It also distances the second speaker—who is perhaps E. E. Cummings himself—from the intense things that the first person says. In this way, Cummings is able to set forth potentially polarizing ideas without having to take full responsibility for them, instead attributing them to the rowdy first speaker.

SETTING

The exact setting of "next to of course god america i" is unclear, though it seems as if the first speaker is delivering some kind of speech or monologue. Whether this takes place in front of an audience is hard to say, but the important thing to grasp is that the first speaker rants feverishly while at least one other person (the second speaker) listens.

In a broader sense, the poem alludes to World War I. This aligns with the fact that it was published in 1926, eight years after the end of the war. Because the poem talks about war, it's relatively safe to assume that it takes place at some point in the time period in which the poem itself was written, placing it more or less in the 1920s. What's more, the poem also probably takes place in the United States, since the first speaker talks so extensively about American patriotism.

CONTEXT

LITERARY CONTEXT

"next to of course god america i" is an anti-war poem written in the aftermath of World War I, but it differs in style from other famous poems that were critical of the war. Poems like Wilfred Owen's "Dulce et Decorum Est" or Siegfried Sassoon's "Attack" present the horrors of war in a more straightforward way by demonstrating the miserable and gruesome realities of trench warfare. By contrast, "next to of course god america i" uses irony and sarcasm to critique the kind of unquestioning patriotism that leads to war.

Interestingly enough, though, not all poetry about World War I was quite so critical. For instance, Alan Seeger's poem "I Have a Rendezvous With Death" glorifies the idea of dying in battle, setting forth a reverent tone that can also be found in the poetry of Rupert Brooke. However, these poets were writing *during* World War I, whereas "next to of course god america i" was published eight years *after* the war had already ended. This, it seems, might shed light on why Cummings was able to write so flippantly and irreverently about the war: because it was over, there was more space for artists to retrospectively speak out against it.

On another note, it's worth mentioning that this poem strays somewhat from Cummings's characteristic interest in nature and love. Indeed, many of Cummings's poems (like "since feeling is first" or "i carry your heart with me(i carry it in") engage with themes often found in Romantic and Transcendentalist literature, despite the fact that Cummings began writing in the Modernist era. In this poem, though, Cummings focuses on patriotism and war, two topics that are more specific and political than the ones that typically appear in his love poems.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The poem's critique of wartime patriotism reflects the way Americans felt about World War I in the 1920s. By the time "next to of course god america i" was published in 1926, there had been ample time for people to reflect upon what had happened during the war, which took place between 1914 and 1918. On the whole, the general perception of the war had already shifted by the mid 1920s, veering away from the ardent patriotism and pro-war mentality that most Americans exemplified during the war. After having seen and heard about the travesties that took place, many Americans came to see World War I as a terrible tragedy, especially since it was one of the bloodiest wars in recent history.

To that end, World War I centered around the use of trench warfare and hand-to-hand combat, meaning that that violence was incredibly up-close and personal. This is why the poem's main speaker talks about soldiers rushing into the "roaring slaughter" of battle, a clear reference to the military tactic of storming the opponent's trenches.

In contrast to the years of World War I, though, the 1920s were years of excess. During this period (known as the Roaring Twenties), the United States enjoyed economic stability and growth, fueling the arts and creating a vibrant culture in which people danced and listened to jazz. It is in this context, then, that E. E. Cummings wrote this poem, perhaps feeling that the country's prosperity and overall happiness had made it possible to voice cynical views about World War I (which Cummings himself had participated in as a volunteer soldier).

MORE RESOURCES

EXTERNAL RESOURCES

- Cummings Reads the Poem — Listen to E. E. Cummings himself read "next to of course god america i" in this old recording. (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_r3CHkyLY4)
- The Life of E. E. — To learn more about E. E. Cummings and his work, check out this brief overview of his life and writing. (https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/e-e-cummings)
- Cummings's Paintings — E. E. Cummings was also a skilled painter—see for yourself in this short exploration of his visual art! (https://www.brainpickings.org/2017/10/05/e-e-cummings-painting/)
- Structure and Style — This essay by the poet Paul Muldoon offers up an interesting investigation of Cummings's odd, inimitable style. (https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2014/03/03/capital-case)
- The Rebellion of E. E. Cummings — An interesting essay about E. E. Cummings's—and his unorthodox stylistic decisions—published in the magazine of his alma mater, Harvard University. (https://harvardmagazine.com/2005/03/the-rebellion-of-ee-cumm.html)

LITCHARTS ON OTHER E. E. CUMMINGS POEMS

- anyone lived in a pretty how town
- i carry your heart with me(i carry it in
- since feeling is first
- somewhere i have never travelled,gladly beyond

HOW TO CITE

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