

Peter Viereck: Vale¹ from Carthage (Spring, 1944)



I, now at Carthage.² He, shot dead at Rome.
 Shipmates last May. “And what if one of us,”
 I asked last May, in fun, in gentleness,
 “Wears doom, like dungarees, and doesn’t know?”
 5 He laughed, “*Not see Times Square³ again?*” The foam,
 Feathering across that deck a year ago,
 Swept those five words—like seeds—beyond the seas
 Into his future. There they grew like trees;
 And as he passed them there next spring, they laid
 10 Upon his road of fire their sudden shade.
 Though he had always scraped his mess-kit pure
 And scrubbed redeemingly his barracks floor,
 Though all his buttons glowed their ritual-hymn
 Like cloudless moons to intercede for him,
 15 No furlough fluttered from the sky. He will
 Not see Times Square—he will not see—he will
 Not see Times
 change; at Carthage (while my friend,
 Living those words at Rome, screamed in the end)
 20 I saw an ancient Roman’s tomb and read
 “*Vale*” in stone. Here two wars mix their dead:
 Roman, my shipmate’s dream walks hand in hand
 With yours tonight (“New York again” and “Rome”),
 Like widowed sisters bearing water home
 25 On tired heads through hot Tunisian sand
 In good cool urns, and says, “I understand.”
 Roman, you’ll see your Forum Square no more;
 What’s left but this to say of any war?

¹ *Vale* is the Latin word for farewell.

¹ Carthage is the site of the famous ancient city in Tunisia, North Africa. In ancient times the rivalry between Rome and Carthage culminated in the Punic Wars. In World War II, Tunisia again figured prominently.

¹ Times Square is the bustling center of New York City—the theater district.

TP - COAST: a mnemonic for poetry

Title	The title is part of the poem; consider any multiple meanings.
Paraphrase	Rephrase the poem using your words.
Connotation	Contemplate the poem for meaning beyond the literal.
Organization	Identify organizational patterns, visual, temporal, spatial, abstract
Attitude	Identify the tone—both the speaker’s and the poet’s attitude
Shifts*	Locate shifts in speaker, tone, setting, syntax, diction...
Title	Examine the title again, this time on an interpretive level
Theme	Determine what the poem says