

## Comparative Literature

This essay focuses on the comparative analysis of two poems. The two poems include *The Second Coming - Poem by William Butler Yeats* and *America - Poem by Claude McKay*. The purpose of this paper is to bring out the similarities and differences between the two poems. The analysis of the two literary devices focuses on elements of poetry such as the form, figures of speech, imagery, rhythm and symbols among others.

In brief, *The Second Coming - Poem by William Butler Yeats* entails a poem in which the persona describes a nightmare in a scene where in he sees the second coming of the Messiah. The poem is organized in two stanzas. The first stanza starts with the imagery of a falcon soaring in spiral gyres into the sky to an extent that they cannot hear the falconer. This scene describes the contemporary situation in the world whereby the young generation (falcon) gives no heed to the words and calling of the old and experienced generation (falconer) and as a result, the persona records the dissociation and anarchy in the world in lines 3-8. In the second stanza the persona calls for the second coming in the first two lines before he becomes the revelator in rest of the poem where he records the sight of sphinx out of *Spiritus Mundi* which means the vast spirit humankind. While this paragraph simply paraphrases the poem, it should be noted that it may be different from other people's perspectives since the poem entails a riddle whose interpretation can vary. In the second poem the persona expresses his unfaltering love for America at a time when the country was full of hatred and racism. The persona is however happy that in the midst of it all, America makes him stronger and he looks forward to a brighter and better future.

The two poems have several similarities. Both poem employ the use rhyme which creates rhythm in the poem. In *The Second Coming* the word gyre rhymes with everywhere in lines 1

and five respectively. Hold in the third line rhymes with world in the fourth line while man rhymes with sun in lines 14 and 15. In *America* there is rhyme with words like bitterness and confess in lines 1 and 3 and tooth and youth in lines 2 and 4. While the rhyme scheme in *America* is regular, the rhyme scheme in *The Second Coming* is irregular hence marking the first difference between the two poems

Both poems reflect the use of imagery and other figures of speech. Imagery in *The Second Coming* has been used in the first two lines where the poet gives the image of the falcon flying in spiral rings (gyres) as it soar high into the sky until it cannot hear the falconer. This imagery gives the impressions of a world that has fallen apart illustrated by the dissociation between the falcon and the falconer. The sphinx also presents a form of imagery representing a strong messiah who will come with intelligence higher than human intelligence as represented by the human face, and the power and strength of a beast as represented by the body of a lion. In *America*, the poet used imagery where he mentions bread of bitterness and tiger's tooth which represent eating from one's sweat and suffering brought about by racism as it is the striped on a tiger's body.

On figures of speech, the first poem uses a metaphor the falcon and the gyre which represents the young people and their deviance from the paths of their elders (falconer). The second stanza of the poem also contains a metaphor in the form of indignant birds flying over the slouching sphinx. In *America*, figure of speech come in the form of a simile in the 7<sup>th</sup> line which states, "Her bigness sweeps my being like a flood." The simile illustrates the intensity of the problem facing the persona in the country. A metaphor is also present in the poem where the poet mentions a tiger whose stripes illustrate the presence of racism and its teeth sinking into the

persona's threat illustrating the pain that the country goes through. Additionally, the persona calls America the culture hell as seen in the 4<sup>th</sup> line.

One of the differences in the two poems happens to be on the use of symbols. In the first poem the poet of use the symbol of the slowly slouching sphinx. At first, the sphinx was fixed in place for twenty centuries but then starts slouching towards Bethlehem though this has been put across as a question. To complete the riddle, the sphinx is the symbol of a supernatural power and the mention of Bethlehem points to Messiah. Secondly, the slouching movement represents the second coming which is near but the indignant birds are not aware of this and that is why they hover above the sphinx. Looking at *America* on the other hand, the poet did not use symbolism

Lastly, the two poems vary in form. *The Second Coming* is presented in the open form. This is illustrated by the differences in the use of rhyme which is haphazard, the number of lines in the two stanzas, and the use of a rhetorical question at the end which gives the line a different tone from that in the body. The first stanza has 8 lines while the second has 14. On the other hand, *America* has a closed form with even lines and regular rhyme scheme which creates rhythm. In addition, the poem has a denotative meaning while *The Second Coming* has a connotative meaning. This is because the former relates directly to racism while the second relates to a second coming which is unclear based on the poet's relation to the sphinx, a beast, as opposed to Jesus.