

Poetry comparison of i shall return and war photographer

[Literature](#), [Poetry](#)



McKay and Duffy come from two very different backgrounds, one being a Jamaican immigrant and the other a Scottish teacher, yet both of their poems seem to amalgamate under the same theme of alien and residential cultures combined. 'I Shall Return' is a lyrical sonnet and details McKay's wish to return to his home of Jamaica. The first couplet shows the writer in an ironically optimistic state. Despite the fact that leaving your home in the early twentieth century usually meant that you would never return, he is determined to believe that he will revisit his homeland again.

This is put across by McKay using repetition in, "I shall return again. I shall return." The second line further concludes this in that he uses fond memories to bring his dream, clearly stated in the opening line, alive. "Wonder-eyes" is a wonderfully descriptive phrase but one cannot help but think if the eyes mentioned are artificial, almost as though he is either looking at his place at the moment of writing with 'rose-tinted spectacles' or whether it reflects the lies he told in that he "shall return."

'War Photographer' has four regular stanzas, which contain rhythmical iambic lines within them. The opening line, "In his darkroom he is finally alone," is very secretive because it doesn't directly tell the reader exactly what is happening and "darkroom" leads the reader to believe that the character is hiding from someone or something. This is effective as it urges the reader to read on. The second line further intrigues our imagination, as we desperately would like to know what exactly are these metaphorically alliterative "spools of suffering".

The next clause of this line, " set out in ordered lines", gives an almost militant impression as soldiers tend to stand in rows. However, to contrast this, in the next line we are told that, " the only light is red and softly glows. " I think that this represents religion as I associate the colour red with the dim lights we see in Church. Despite the fact that this could be seen as a contrast, I see this as a possible hint that the " spools of suffering" contain images of a religious war. The next two lines confirm my belief that the poem has some sort of religious connotation.

The final part of the first stanza is almost life defining and as a result makes it a central point of the entire poem. " All flesh is grass", is a philosophical metaphor and is a reference from St Peter. It attracts the reader's attention as it gives a deeper insight into Duffy's personal life, showing that perhaps she has some sort of lack of belief in God. The second stanza of Duffy's poem contains a number of contrasts, which is very effective as it constantly pushes the reader to view different points of the poem.

His hands which did not tremble... seem to now", leads us to believe the photographer is not as stable and without emotion as we are led to believe in the first verse. There is also humour, which takes an almost cynical tone, in, " ordinary pain, which simple weather can dispel. " This means that in the character's home, England, weather is always a good simple topic to use in conversation as opposed to the subject of pain. Throughout 'I Shall Return', there is a strong sense of colour and vibrancy, reflecting the culture he perhaps left behind. Blue-black smoke to sapphire skies" is rich in imagery and is quite ambiguous.

By blue and black being hyphenated together, it gives them sort of connection, and to me, this connection is bruising or some sort of injury. I think that this represents his pain for leaving his home. At the end of the second stanza in 'War Photographer,' the rhythm begins to pick up as memories return to him, building up tension. The third verse begins with "something is happening," which entices the reader to read on to find what this "something" is.

A half-formed ghost" is a metaphor used to describe the images in the photographs because most of the characters are now dead, ghosts themselves, and these are memories the photographer would much rather see die in his mind. This is a contrast to 'I Shall Return," because that poem details McKay's desire to keep all recollection of his home alive. The final clause, "foreign dust," is emotive as the thought of dying in an alien culture springs horror into even the most strong-minded character.

In 'I Shall Return,' the alliterative line, "That bathe the brown blades of the bending grasses," shows some sort of pessimism for the first time in the poem. The harsh repetitive "b" sound gives a harder tone to the poem, which may signal his resentment that in fact he won't ever return to Jamaica. This line also gives the poem a different sense of rhythm. "dear delicious tunes" on line 10 shows his true feelings for his country; the affection he holds.

It is also quite an English term and because many of the colloquialisms used in the West Indies are based solely upon the English dialect, this phrase

shows that everything down to his speech is still Jamaican through and through. In the final stanza of Duffy's poem, we are told from the hundreds of harrowing photographs, " his editor will pick out five or six. "

This is quite heartless as it verifies that the reader is not receiving the full story through their " Sunday supplement" and so the many disturbing images the war photographer had to see were all in vain. He stares impassively" symbolises how worn out the photographer has become and the idiomatic cliché of 'living to work as opposed to working to live' comes into play. During the final part of 'I Shall Return,' the lines " That stir the hidden depths of native life, stray melodies of dim-remembered tunes," is very important as it holds darker previously un-seen glimpses. As the writer is an enthusiast of the Black working-class movements it is quite obvious to say that this part of the poem details, with ambiguity, the senses of apartheid he feels has been created between his place of birth and his current place of residence.

Straight after this, the opening line is repeated again. This is effective as we can finally verify that his returning again is merely a hope that will most likely never happen due to the vacuum-like separation between the countries and races he encounters. I cannot help but wonder if he perhaps believes that his returning would be equal to him running away from the problems of the world, of which he feels responsible for. However the final line, " To ease my mind of long, long years of pain," states that his return may help matters, particularly his own sanity.

Both 'War Photographer' and 'I Shall Return' are similar in that they each move between worlds, but wholly belong to neither. Duffy and McKay also find similarities in that both of their poems detail two cultures, one being their home and the other a place of occupation and they both find flaws in each of them. Both McKay's contribution to the literary legacy of the Harlem Renaissance and Duffy's skill of changing the way the reader will look at war photographers ever again are arts in themselves and for that both poems should be framed with their own places in literature.