

A discussion, comparison and contrasting of the poems grass and the mist by carl ...

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A Discussion, Comparison and Contrasting of the Poems “ Grass” and “ The Mist” by Carl Sandburg Carl Sandburg is an internationally acclaimed American poet, who claims the rare honor of having been awarded with the Pulitzer Prize twice. His poems, “ Grass” and “ The Mist,” deal with the elements of nature and their specific relevance to human lives. The author deftly uses several literary elements in these poems such as form, imagery, symbols tone etc to develop and communicate his theme to the audience. Poetry can be perceived as an art form where the artist has the leeway to display various literary elements to project subtle images, to communicate his or her ideas to the readers, without having to resort to straight forward narration of the message. Both the above mentioned works are classic examples of effective deployment of literary devices in communicating the theme, though their basic themes are drastically differ from each other. In the poem “ Grass” Sandburg uses the form of free verse, eschewing any rhyme scheme or meter. By this, the author aims to make the poem simple and not too intense and achieves this subjective to a great extent. However, the second, fourth and sixth lines have some distant conformity to rhyme scheme by deploying words such as ‘ work,’ ‘ Gettysburg’ and ‘ work’ again. But, overall it still has a rhythm, which flows and gives it the quality of a lyrical poem. Moreover, free verse being without any rules, gives the poet the opportunity to innovate and make his own set of rules. The author seems to have chosen this form so that he can express his ideas in ordinary terms. “ What place is this,” “ Where are we now,” to which the narrator responds, “ I am the grass,” “ Let me work.” Though the words are not very poetic in themselves, they do convey some inner meaning. The way the grass replies,

so bluntly, gives the idea that it means business and is not here to fool around. Now, if one chooses a different set of words, say rhyming words, it definitely cannot create the same affect and that is probably why he decides to work with free verse. It all comes down to the fact that the form plays a crucial role in conveying the theme and tone. These elements all work together to bring in that perfection, which the poet seeks. The images portrayed in the poem, while being poignant are horrifying. They point to simple human follies that keep repeating in the form of ravages of war. First of all, the poem begins with the image already there, unlike some poems where the image gradually builds up. The readers see these images of dead bodies piled up and being shoveled into the ground. This is an anti-war poem, thus, obviously there will be dead bodies. But the narrator here, the grass, is not at all sad and does not feel sorry for the people who died as victims of war. Instead, by choosing a narrator that is an inevitable part of nature, the poet creates a perspective about the damage that ongoing human errors cause to themselves, while the other elements of nature remains eternal. The grass orders for the bodies to be piled up and shoveled under. The tone that the poet conveys through the protagonist, the grass, is indifference towards the dead, which is reflected throughout the poem. Thus, it just treats these bodies like rubbish or waste, which are to be piled up and shoveled under the surface of the earth. The grass does not want to wait for them to be cremated or buried respectfully, but it just wants everything to be finished off quickly so that it can get to work. The poet, by deploying imagery and symbolism, wants to imply that human lives, at the behest of their own kind, do not receive the intended value on earth. Thus, by using

different literary elements, Sandburg illustrates the utter disregard humans have for their species, through his poem, “ Grass”. On the other hand, the poem, “ The Mist,” deals with the eternity of mist, as an element in nature and the mortality of humans. In this poem also, Sandburg uses various literary devices such as imagery, symbolism, tone etc to communicate the dominance of mist on earth. The foreboding imagery of arms, “ Long as the reach of time and space,” clearly provides the readers a sense of the eternity of mist (Sandburg). Again, in the next line, the author uses tone for an awe-inspiring effect when he writes, “ But one passes me” The narrator in the poem, mist, also proclaims that it “ Was at the first of things and it will be the last” (Sandburg). Thus, through the literary devices of imagery, tone and symbolism, the author effectively presents the theme of everlasting nature of mist, which withstands all the tests of time. Though both poems share common features in terms of their use of literary devices to subtly communicate their themes, they differ in the context of their basic themes. In the poem “ Grass” the author portrays the theme of the ravages of war and human stubbornness which leads to the death of their own kind. On the other hand, in the poem, “ The Mist,” the author illustrates the eternity of mist, which surpasses all living beings and remains a dominant element on the earth. The image in the latter is awe inspiring while the image the author projects in the former about human beings is pathetic.