Poem Analysis

Both poems have employed imagery. In the first poem, “If we must die,” the persona wonders why they were being hunted and killed like dogs (Tillery, 1992). He likens human beings as being mistreated, scorned and shouted at, as if they were useless and valueless as compared to their chasers. The word dog in the poem figuratively shows how badly the persona and his group were being seen by their tormentors (Ramesh, Sree, & Kandula, 2006). In the second poem, “Yet Do I marvel” by Countee Cullen, the persona draws likeness between the human beings and God. He asks why people were created like God, yet they have to die. In this likeness, he draws the differences in power, showing reverence for God, through line 9, ‘Inscrutable His ways are, and immune’ (Tillery, 1992).

The tones in the two poems are slightly different. In the first poem, “If we must die”, the persona is seemingly agitated, angry and ready to strike back. His use of his people being treated like dogs, then telling them to react and reiterate is clearly asking them to fight back. He is relentless in calling for violence and asking his people to stop stooping low and being killed innocently (Tillery, 1992). He calls for reiteration. The tone is different in the second poem, Yet Do I marvel. He takes a rather calm tone with God at the center-stage (Tillery, 1992). He wonders why people who were made in God’s image were treated unfairly, and why they were not allowed to express themselves openly. He is more thoughtful, emotional and spiritual. His is like a plea to God, asking why one had to bear two contradicting forms, of a poet and being black.

Despite a tone calling for aggression and reaction to fight their enemies in the first poem, the author uses a cynical tone that shows helplessness and resignation (Sienkewicz, 1992). He calls for a fight, but he states that it was a fight that they would not win. It was a fight that would only earn respect and
honor, but one that would not stop their deaths. It does not give hope to the kinsmen (Sienkewicz, 1992). This is also the case in the second poem. It uses myths that ended in helplessness. The poem states of a status that cannot be repaired, of a poet being born a poet. Since none of these can be changed, he sees it as a lost course to try and live both as a poet and as black. None of these could be changed.

The two poems take a similar form, with none of them having uniform lines and stanzas

They both have a single stanza and In If we must die, lines 1 and 3 rhyme, while 2 and 4 also rhyme. Also, lines 13 and 14 rhyme. For most of the poem, the rhyme alternates across the lines. This creates a rhythm that has further shows aggression and ire to fight back. In the second poem, the rhyme is even better. It is rhythmic and sounds poetic, leading to strong passing of the message (Tillery, 1992).

In the second poem, the rhyme is more consistent. For example, lines 1 and 3 rhyme, just like in the first poem. However, line 2 rhymes with no other. Line Eleven rhymes with 12 and line 13 with 14. The two poems have 14 lines, and just a single verse each. This element shows finality and solid thoughts put together with a concrete message. In the first poem, the persona is calling for war, while in the second; he is calling for an understanding of God. The rhyme in the last two lines in each of the two poems is a sign of urgency and assertion of the main ideas. The first poem shows the need to start the struggle immediately, while the second one stresses the main argument, without compromising the strength and belief that God is the Almighty and unbeatable (Tillery, 1992).

Another difference between the poems is that the first poem does not refer to the actual people being addressed (Tillery, 1992). The persona is saying is that his people have been attacked, while he does not disclose who his people are at any point. He refers to them as kinsmen, and also does not disclose who their attackers were. In the second poem, however, the persona is wondering how God can do all the good things He does, but create a poet to be black.