

ENGLISH STANDARD: *THE SHOE-HORN SONATA*

Distinctively visuals appear when a text illustrates vivid images to enable us not only to perceive the meanings within the story and the characters emotions but also to allow us to experience the situations as if through multiple senses. John Misto, the writer of “Shoe-Horn Sonata” and Wilfred Owen poems, the poet of “Dulce et Decorum est” both utilise distinctively visual elements in their evocative texts to convey the characters emotions and experiences of horrific sufferings during war. Through the composer’s careful selection of powerful features and forms, themes and sacrifices, which maintain a high level of authenticity and create profound impacts in the audience.

Sacrifice is indeed a horrible experience in war. This theme is undoubtedly explored in Act One, Scene Eight of Shoe-Horn Sonata through descriptive images in Sheila’s reflection about saving Bridie’s life by going to one of the Japanese soldiers. The line “I couldn’t look at them in the eyes, so I stared at their backs” employs ellipsis and the emotive verb “stared” to evoke a reluctant and solemn tone. The negative tone is further reinforced in the stage direction “locking door of the shoe-horn”, as the “shoe-horn” is a cohesive symbol of Sheila’s pain, sacrifice and shame, which acts as a constant reminder of Sheila’s suffering throughout the text. Thus the distinctively visual elements vividly portray Sheila’s painful experiences in the POW camp by engaging us to visualise her within these situations.

Similarly, the notion of sacrifice is also persuasively explored in “Dulce et Decorum est” when the persona creates visual images to describe the soldiers’ suffering while fighting for their country during the war. In Stanza One, the powerful verbs “blood-shod” and “drowning”, and the paradox “marched asleep” contributes to the cohesive motif of suffering, hence powerfully projects a horrific image of the soldiers’ painful experiences. This image is made more vivid and painful for us through the use of onomatopoeia “guttery”, as the audience are not only engaged to visualise the terrible scenes but also to listen as if experiencing the situation. Thus the distinctively visual in the poem successfully convey the soldiers and their pain experiences in the war.

Distinctively visual elements used in “Shoe-Horn Sonata” also help to present the theme of truth. The truth of that war is an extreme, terrifying experience that no one would ever want to try. Misto explores this concept by juxtaposing a “photograph of Australian army nurses disembarking in Singapore, projected on the screen”, with a description of the disgrace to women in the POW camp. In the photograph a low-angled full shot is employed to capture a group of women in straight stances, using their clean costume to represent their pride. Their facial expressions remind their excitement where direct gazes are used to allow the audience to feel their mood. Hence, in scene five, Sheila reveals the situation the food in the camp in the dialogue. Toilets were dug out in the open, i.e. had to

squat. This image suggests an idea of “no poverty for women” which forcibly engages the audience to put ourselves in their situation and tell the extreme humiliation and misery. Therefore, through a variety of distinctively visual elements, the characters emotions and situations are powerfully conveyed.

Likewise, the persona also undoubtedly exemplifies the theme of truth in his juxtaposition. Owen juxtaposes horrific images created in the poem to the last two lines which has a connotation of “it is sweet and just to die for my country”. The horrific images are portrayed through the motif of suffer, with words that symbolise death “devils sick of sin”. By contrasting these images to the title and the last two lines, a sarcastic tone is evolved, hence allows us to perceive the underlying truth in war. The distinctly visual elements undoubtedly portray the soldiers suffering.

Through an array of powerful and stylistic features, the composers of “Shoe-Horn Sonata” and “Dulce et Decorum est” successfully illustrates vivid images in the audiences’ mind, and enable us to experience the characters’ emotions and sufferings during the war.