

Discuss how meaning develops through particular style and imagery in TWO of Harwood's poems.

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Imagery stimulates particular emotions whilst the elements of style can influence the way a text is organised. Gwen Harwood often uses particular style and imagery to develop meaning. In Harwood's philosophical reflections, "Barn Owl" and "Spelling Prize" particular style and imagery are used to offer the reader a seemingly simple, yet powerful meaning. Memory is a strong notion in both of these poems as it is linked to ideas about immortality. The force and impact of memory and movement from innocence to maturity are explored and developed in these poems through particular style and imagery.

"Spelling Prize" uses a particular element of style to immediately develop meaning. In the first stanza, the syntax and stanza structure is manipulated significantly. This poem deals with the persona's first experience with death. The persona, as a child, is at her friend's house and sees the brutal death of a calf. It is this memory that has a great impact on her life and her actions thereafter, in the poem, are influenced significantly. Most of Harwood's poems consist of controlled stanzas. However, this first stanza is not as formal because the persona is recapturing and establishing the associated and influential memory. The contrast between the uncontrolled structure of the first stanza and the controlled subsequent stanzas furthers the idea of the persona recapturing memory. This first stanza holds descriptive details "wooden forms that seated four in discomfort" which shows the intense and vivid nature of the memory. The details enhance the level of impact of the memory; the persona even recalls the words involved in the competition "ghost, nymph, flight, nephew..." The importance, effect and the force of the persona's childhood memory is developed instantly in the first stanza by means of sentence and stanza manipulation.

The symbolism of the calf, which died, enhances the force and influence of memory. This rhetorical element of style is significant as it develops and highlights a movement from innocence to maturity. The persona witnesses Ella's "father killing a bull calf". This experience has a great and obvious effect upon the persona. The persona seemed to be oblivious to any prior experiences of death "sent me crying across the yard", thus the persona's innocent idea of their own immortality became clouded with a harsh perception of death. As the calf's eyes "looked back at what had become of the world", the persona's naïve and utopian perception immortality is significantly altered. The symbolism of the calf works significantly in developing meaning. By heightening the notion of the persona's movement from innocence to maturity the force of memory and the notion of immortality are significantly developed.

Imagery, working with the calf symbol, notably develops the meaning offered. Eye imagery is used in this poem to convey that particular actions can have serious consequences. Ella, the only construction that is named in the poem to intensify the reader's level of sympathy towards her, and the calf are interrelated through eye imagery. The first use of eye imagery is immediately after the death of the calf, whose "eyes, still trusting" develop a message of innocence and trust, on behalf of the calf – much like the feelings of the persona, innocent and trusting. The last stanza echoes the use of eye imagery through a rhyming couplet which holds the purpose of the poem: "one hurt look from her red-rimmed eyes / at my coveted, worthless prize." The image of Ella's sad, 'red-rimmed' eyes enlightens the persona that her actions can have an effect on others. By the persona realising that her once valuable prize is now 'worthless' a development from innocence to maturity is shown: through the persona's reaction to Ella's miserable state, the prize loses all personal value. The idea of consequences is highlighted significantly through eye imagery. The eye imagery works effectively to show the effect of two constructions that were destroyed by other people's actions.

“Barn Owl” is another of Harwood’s poems where meaning develops through the use of particular style and imagery. “Barn Owl” is also a memory poem where the persona recalls its first experience of death. Whilst the persona’s father was asleep, the persona shot an owl and its perceptions of immortality were ruined, as was the persona’s innocence. The use of light imagery immediately sets the scene in the first line of the poem - “Daybreak:” However the poem’s first word offers far more than its literal meaning. The instant image of light goes on to demonstrate that the child persona is to emerge from the simple, comforting darkness of innocence and must face the remorseless light of day. Light imagery helps to convey that actions can have consequences. As the poem progresses the reader has the ability to enhance the effect of the light imagery. The “horny fiend” on the brink of maturity has to start facing its actions. After shooting the owl, the persona’s construction moves from the innocent and naïve nature. Light imagery instantly develops meaning by demonstrating the notion of childhood innocence to maturity. Whilst innocent, the persona was unaware that its actions could have disastrous consequences on others and the impact it had upon the persona’s first realisation of the permanence of death.

Meaning is developed significantly through personification as it helps to highlight the persona’s loss of innocence. The personification of sleep makes the child’s actions seem more covert and deceitful. The personification of the father’s sleep is shown here, “Let him dream of a child obedient, angel-mild – old No-Sayer, robbed of power by sleep”. It is obvious to the reader that sleep itself cannot steal the father’s power. Thus the personification develops the innocent and naïve nature of the child. By the persona’s presumption that it personally is the “master of life and death” the development the effect of the memory is illustrated by showing the persona’s shift to maturity. The personification of the father’s sleep heightens the persona’s innocence view on the world. It highlights how the

construction does not perceive its father and the owl in a realistic manner. The fact the poem is a memory shows the movement to maturity.