

Elizabeth Brands, Aaron Esau, Gareth Kelleher, Citlali Nieves Lira, Brandon Matheson, and
Rasheed Tarhuni

Ms. Townzen

IB Literature 11 HL

25 February 2019

“A Self-Portrait” Essay

In 500 B.C., Confucius expressed his belief that women are men’s servants by proclaiming that “it is the law of nature that women should be held under the dominance of man.” Such a declaration would be subject to heavy criticism in a more modern era. A Chinese poet named Shu Ting analyzes this relationship theory from a progressive viewpoint in her poem “A Self-Portrait” using contrasts, repetition, and point of view. Ting asserts that when women do not comply with the will of men, their relationship will deteriorate into a war, with each side vying for dominance over the other.

The shot of a man and woman in the reflection of the mirror mimics Ting’s use of repetition to reveal how men see women as their possessions. The septets describe the woman as an opposable force to the man, while the repeated line “She’s his little schemer” portrays the woman as inferior and childish while belonging to the man. The repeated reflection in the mirror scene in the film depicts an image in which men are in the forefront and women are behind them. The women, basked in light, appear taller than the men, who sit in the shadows. The lighting and shot angle make the women appear more powerful and significant, yet the men still assume their position in front of the women. Ignorant to the women’s power, the men still try to appear superior, believing they still own the women. The women will always be their little schemers.

The contrasting images found in the poem, illustrate women's opposition towards societal norms. By opposing the man, the woman also opposes society's expectations of women. Ting describes the personality of a woman with, "One time she seems like an iceberg, / Another time like a fiery ocean" (20-21). The contrasting images describe the unpredictable and complicated personality of the woman, which confuses the man. An iceberg is cold and isolated while a fiery ocean is aggressive and dangerous. Having such radical emotions destroys the man's expectations for an ideal woman. Similarly, the film's shot of snow on fire creates a contrasting image that defies expectations. Snow, the complete opposite side of the spectrum from fire, are together. In fact, they rarely exist together for long periods of time. The contradiction to logic confuses the viewer, just like the men are confused by the woman with her actions defying norms. The shot treats the viewer like the confused men when a woman opposes them.

The portrayal of the male and female in the film mimics the subjects of the poem to assert that the power struggle within relationships is universal. With regard to the poem, the male and female, displayed differently in each stanza, create different identities for their respective personas. For example, the poem describes the female as mischievous and possessing childlike behaviors by informing the reader that "When begged for an answer she keeps quiet, / When silence is needed, she laughs and makes jokes" (2-3). This suggests that the female in stanza one is relatively young. Lines twenty two through twenty three in stanza three display a different persona of the female: "Sometimes she's a wordless song. / While listening, he thinks it may be true or false;"(22-23). The comparison of the female to a song indicates her possessing dynamic qualities, as songs require expressive features. The male cannot decide whether the song is true or false, meaning that the woman can create a statement that is complex enough to astound him.

Dynamic qualities and the ability to compose complex arguments imply that the female in this stanza is experienced, as opposed to the childlike qualities of the female in the first stanza, showing that the women are different people. In the film, the male and female characters change in each stanza, indicating that the poem is not referencing a specific couple, but rather the general relationship between men and women.

Within the film, the producer depicts the male and female in each stanza as a different couple, indicating the different relationships throughout mankind, as the poem does. As the different females in the relationships cause disturbances, their counterpart males react in disbelief. From this information, the audience infers that the struggle for dominance between males and females is universal.

“A Self-Portrait” Essay Outline

- I. Introduction (done)
- II. The technique
 - A. Shu Ting’s use of it in the poem
 - B. How our film uses it
 - C.
- III. The use of repetition confirms how men see women as possessions.
 - A. Repetition of “She’s his little schemer” confirms the woman as a possession to the man. The speaker never changes his mind on the relationship, no matter what the woman does. The sentence never changes and is repeated 3 times to emphasize the relationship between the woman and the man, and the diction as well portrays

the woman as a silly little girl who is up to no good, but she is innocent enough.

The last repetition of She's his little schemer is preceded by "His, his,"

emphasizing that she is his, and will never be free from him. Also, his, his, his

little schemer can be referring the woman being a little schemer to multiple men, which generalizes all women as possessions to men.

- B. Men always place themselves in the forefront, even when they appear insignificant compared to women. Even when women are higher up and more important than men, the men refuse to accept women as superior or even equals. They will always assume they are supposed to be in the forefront, that everything revolves around themselves and their actions/emotions, even when it is clear they aren't. The men position themselves in front of the women, to keep them in their shadow, but the women are seen taller, and in the light, while the men are in the dark. The men are oblivious to their position, continuing to think women are submissive to men, no matter how much taller or shadowed by the women they are.
- IV. The portrayal of the male and female in the film mimics the subject of the poem to assert the power struggle within relationships as a universal affair.
 - A.
 - B. Within the film, the male and female couple are always different. This artistic element conveys
- V. Conclusion: By using literary techniques effectively, readers are allowed to connect an author's work to real world issues, or gain multiple interpretations that intrigue the reader.

Shu Ting in the poem *A Self-Portrait*, effectively uses contrasts, repetition, and point of view to show that when women do not agree with men, a relationship will deteriorate and both sides will try overpower each other. In our film, we effectively mimic Ting's tone in the poem to re-create a visual understanding of the conflict between men and women.