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Yusef Komunyakaa's Use of Imagery for Tone in Facing It

Yusef Komunyakaa's poem "Facing It" uses an outstanding focus with imagery to convey the tone which will evoke many different emotions from somberness to excitement and fear. The narrator starts off talking to himself and trying not to cry at what is eventually revealed as the Vietnam Veterans Memorial. While there, the persona is going through a very different set of emotions and thoughts as he is seeing people and almost feeling what they feel as they are either moving on, staying in sadness or just being a hardened veteran. The overall tone of the poem varies but there is a feel to it that can be interpreted as solemn.

Komunyakaa gives the reader a very ghostly feel when he says things like, "A white vets image floats/ closer to me, then his pale eyes/ look through mine. I'm a window"(25-27). These images signify something otherworldly which slightly differentiates from the overall theme but significantly adds to the tone of a, possible, war veteran visiting the Vietnam Veterans Memorial because normally it's a place of sadness not supernatural entities. There are other words that the writer uses so to give a feeling that the persona itself is a ghost. "I turn/ this way- the stone lets me go./I turn that way- I'm inside/ the Vietnam Veterans Memorial/ again, depending on the light/ to make a difference"(8-13). The reader can infer that ghosts cannot be in the light and that can mean that the persona is trapped in the Vietnam Veterans Memorial like a ghost would be.

“Names shimmer on a woman’s blouse/ but when she walks away/ the names stay on the wall.”(19-21) The word choice and usage in this excerpt makes the reader imagine that there really are names on a woman’s blouse in bright letters which give off a shimmering quality but then as she walks away the names come off her blouse and back on the wall. This gives off a somber vibe that coincides with the ghostly quality of other parts of the poem. Komunyakaa’s word usage and choice adds greatly to the tone and it plays with the reader’s imagination by creating an illusion that the persona, himself, is a ghost.

Komunyakaa also uses words that evoke emotions that make the reader feel what the people in the poem feel which completely differs from another part of the poem which gives off a ghostly feel. “Names shimmer on a woman’s blouse/ but when she walks away/ the names stay on the wall”(19-21). Komunyakaa writes this to bring the image of a woman who feels sorrow for the loss of a loved one but she is ready to move on and that’s why the names stay on the wall, figuratively speaking, instead of staying on her blouse and keeping her in her somber sadness. There could be many ways to interpret this quote from the poem but that way seems to bring the most feeling out of that excerpt from the poem. Komunyakaa writes, “I touch the name Andrew Johnson; / I see the booby trap’s white flash”(17-18). That brings the emotions of fear, excitement, and eventually sadness because its use of imagery shows a man stepping on a booby trap and dying in a white flash which could be interpreted as an explosion. The writer tries to evoke a set of different emotions that culminate into an altogether humbling experience. There are words in the poem that puts the reader into the persona’s shoes and adds to that experience as in, “A white vets image floats/ closer to me, then his pale eyes/ look through mine. I’m a window.”(25-27)

This excerpt evokes a feeling of worthlessness as the persona has taken the reader in the outside world into the poem as the persona itself which almost makes it an entirely new poem. The way Komunyakaa evokes emotion out of other characters and the events that they go through to add a new dimension to the tone of the poem.

Yusef Komunyakaa's poem "Facing It" starts off with a person visiting the Vietnam Veterans Memorial. Then it gets more complex as the poem goes along which brings in multi-tiered levels of emotion that can feel as though the persona is a ghost at some times, there is a small level of excitement that also brings out other completely different emotions that add to the overall solemn tone throughout. Komunyakaa's imagery adds to the tone because it makes the reader feel what the people in the poem feel and it also creates a feeling that the persona itself is a ghost which contrasts very nicely which culminates into an experience that is both sad, and interesting.