How does the study of Australian Visions influence perceptions of Australia?

The study of Australian Visions influence perceptions of Australia. Through John Misto's play *The Shoe Horn Sonata* and Kevin Gilbert's poem *The New True Anthem*, we experience different visions of what it is to be Australian. The play focuses on two fictional characters Bridie and Sheila who represent true accounts of prisoner of war experiences in a Japanese war camp in World War 2.

Misto felt strongly that women who served in the war were not given due recognition. He uses a variety of techniques to create the reality of these visions of bravery, the human spirit and the strength and mateship. Gilbert's Australian vision is that Australia has been restored by white colonization. Both of them influence perceptions of Australia.

One of the lasting visions of bravery which Misto emphasizes from the opening scene where darkness reveals Bridie reenacting the 'Kow Tow' commanded by the Japanese guards and the explanation of 'They would make us stand in the afternoon sun - in the middle of the jungle' to the bravery of Sheila who sells herself to the Japanese guard for quinine to save Bridie's life. This reinforces the vision of mateship as an Australian value.

Historical images also emphasizes Misto's vision of Australian sense of duty through 1940's posters of the women's army and nurses landing in Singapore. The propaganda was
powerful as Bridie says ‘I guess I wanted to be like my dad.’ This technique means we are always usually aware of how meaningful the dialogue is. Stage directions allow Misto to insert authorial comment - a sign in Singapore of 1941 says ‘Doubt! Don’t listen to rumour.’ Misto adds ‘...it only they had’ and again at the fall of Singapore where a photo of hundreds of victorious Japanese soldier celebrate. Misto says ‘It is a most disturbing sight.’

Visions of the power of the human spirit are celebrated throughout the play. Bridie prevents Sheila from drowning by constantly tapping her with the shoe horn. Background music reflects the mood whilst ironic choice of ‘Happy times times’ introduces scene 5 as Bridie details the horrors of the sinking of Vyner Brooke and the loss of life. On capture they were referred as useless mouths, states Sheila. But these months together create the vision of a choir with the shoe horn as a metronome giving them hope and renewing their spirits. The choir came to end through death and the weakness but the strength and unity of Sheila and Bridie saw the formation of a sonata and a haunting vision of humming ‘We’d do it while we dug the graves’ is recalled by Sheila.

Kevin Gilbert’s poem The New True Anthem reflects a bitter, angry tone. As an Aboriginal and political activist, he felt...
Strongly about the treatment of his people and the environment.
The poem is a parody of Dorothea Mackellar's My Country and is rich in visual imagery as the language condemns white settlement and Aboriginal despair. White man's savagery is captured in 'your barbaric graffiti. Cut scars where tall trees grow' which is a metaphor for the horrific treatment endured by many Aboriginal people. His monologue stresses 'you', which is us 'you polluted the rivers and litter every road'. His Australian vision is that the country has been destroyed by white colonisation.

Australian visions reflect on our history, values and what it is to be Australian. The play uses authentic footage, language and authorial comment to celebrate the efforts of Australian women. Conversely, the poem uses a dark vision of Aboriginal suffering under white rule. Both of these, however, both of the play The Shoe Horn Sonata and the poem The New True Anthem influence perceptions of Australia.