

“A consideration of textual form is essential in understanding the purpose of a text”

Political representations are driven by elements of textual form, enabling individuals to gain a greater understanding of the purpose of the text. These stylistic choices seek to influence individuals to reconsider their established views and adopt a new agenda that entails instigating socio-political change. Using the memoir form, involving personal anecdotes and first person narration, Henry Reynolds' Why Weren't We Told? (1999) represents the mistreatment of Indigenous Australians as a catalyst for their dispossession and inequality, challenging recurring misconceptions of Australia's political history. Interviews and voiceovers are incorporated in Heather Kirkpatrick's documentary Mary Meets Mohammed (2013) to illuminate the prejudice against asylum seekers and advocates for positive media representations and changing attitudes towards those who come to Australia fleeing persecution. Although the texts address different concerns, both composers use textual form to represent their political agendas which entails challenging interracial barriers in Australian society, thus empowering individuals to create connections with others and cultivate respect for these diverse cultures.

Reynolds' selection of personal anecdotes and historical evidence are critical elements of textual form that helps persuade individuals to re-evaluate the established views regarding Australian history and the immoral suppression of Indigenous people. The memoir structure enables Reynolds to create an intimate appeal to the audience by drawing upon personal anecdotes. Through his personal experiences living in Townsville from the 1960s to 1970s, Reynolds uses multiple anecdotes involving emergency services in which the first question asked was “Is she black?” This consequently reveals the truth associated with the segregation of Indigenous people within Townsville society. Reynolds also uses the memoir form to reflect on the deficiencies in his own education about Australian history, highlighted in “I knew little...I had no idea... I was ignorant” in the introduction. The first-person narration, emphasised by the anaphora, engages the audience to relate with his experiences and reconsider the media's misrepresentation of the subjugation of Indigenous Australians. As a Revisionist historian, Reynolds breaks “The Great Australian Silence”, criticising the colonial settlers' violent “frontal assault and bloody expropriation of land”, and their persecution

of the Indigenous population. Reynolds employs this visceral imagery to expound a greater awareness of the colonial brutality, and the orthodox attitudes regarding the violation of Indigenous sovereignty. This institutionalised racism is reinforced by contemporary anecdotes coupled with hyperbolic expression used when Reynolds describes “two Aboriginal brothers...attempting to break into a car,” leading to a pursuit that “resembled the Ku Klux Klan chasing a black man.” The historical analogy to the Ku Klux Klan who physically assaulted African Americans forms the basis of Reynolds’ arguments to challenge his society with his knowledge of Indigenous vilification. Consequently, the audience becomes more aware of the inequality facing Indigenous people through Reynolds’ use of pathos that challenges enduring social and cultural values. Moreover, Reynolds’ selected recount of two Aboriginal girls portrays that the failure of authority to govern fairly intensified the impacts upon the Indigenous people. Reynolds deliberately writes about two Aboriginal girls who find themselves in prison for swearing at a teacher, revealing a “disparity between the offence and the punishment.” This injustice challenges the dominant societal belief “that Australia was a society that valued equality above all other virtues”. By omitting cases of more serious offences, Reynolds changes the perception of the Australian jurisprudence as the audience becomes acutely aware of the inherent racism and discrimination within such a legal system. Consequently, Reynolds laments that Australia’s history should be properly researched and publicly disclosed so the audience can obtain a greater awareness of the violent settlement in the past. Using historical monograph and memoir, Reynolds ultimately compels the audience to question the misrepresentation of Australia’s history and acknowledge the poor treatment of Indigenous Australians of the past and present.

Similar to how Reynolds desires to instigate socio-political change in Australia by challenging Indigenous disempowerment, Kirkpatrick attempts to influence individuals to reconsider their preconceived assumptions of asylum seekers through the documentary form of Mary Meets Mohammed. Kirkpatrick uses interviews with the public to not only represent the diverse political sentiments towards asylum seekers, but also to expose how their racist ideas are based on flimsy myths. Kirkpatrick weaves a more profound social commentary through her interviews with Tasmanian locals, revealing how immigrants are an easy scapegoat for the lack of services provided,

inadequate welfare and employment. This absurd myth that refugees have it easy whereas working class people are neglected is highlighted through the emotive language when a local argues, “They [the refugees] have doctors up there...we don’t even have a doctor here.” Furthermore, the crosscutting between these interviews and Mohammad’s voiceover demonstrates Kirkpatrick’s purpose in revealing the dichotomy between the rumours and reality of an asylum seeker’s life. Volunteer Emily’s observations of asylum seekers as “normal real touchable human beings playing soccer” is presented on voiceover track against media footage of them on boats with blank facial expressions. Like how Reynolds condemns the media’s misrepresentation of Indigenous history, Kirkpatrick establishes the disparity between asylum seekers in reality and their portrayal in the media, denoting the social stigmas between races inevitably created by stereotypical media representations. Consequently, Kirkpatrick espouses for more empathetic attitudes and humane policies regarding asylum seekers. Similar to Reynolds, Kirkpatrick deliberately selects personal anecdotes and experiences to espouse a multicultural society with more humane policies. This is portrayed through the two-shot of Mary watching Mohammad sit and read, indicating his innocence and desire to learn, subverting xenophobic preconceptions of asylum seekers as unproductive members of society. Therefore, through the documentary form of Mary Meets Mohammed, Kirkpatrick reveals the discredibility of media representations, in attempt to persuade individuals to reconsider perceived views towards asylum seekers.

In representing the political facets in Australian history, Reynolds draws upon political acts and anecdotes to argue that our new political awareness must be matched by a shift in political values to enable social change and reconciliation. Reynolds’ approach to reconciliation is that an acceptance of Indigenous history will strengthen relations between the Indigenous and non-Indigenous people. Reynolds argues that the recognition of the role of Indigenous history is paramount to unifying society wherein “national guilt” and “saying sorry” are an obligation. He advocates this opinion by condemning how “European men virtually had power of life and death over Aborigines.” The hyperbole demonstrates the inherent superiority of Europeans and their disregard of Indigenous history due to their “intellectual drive for establishing a White Australia.” The ANZAC tradition of

remembrance, underpinned by larrikin egalitarianism, is contested through Reynolds' rhetorical questioning of "If we are to continue to celebrate the sacrifice of men and women who died for their country can we deny admission to fallen tribesman?" This leads to a greater awareness of the impacts of such hypocrisy from Australians, stirring the responders' social conscience. However, Reynolds also acknowledges that Australians need to recognise the past and Australia's progressive improvement through the anecdotal allusion: "Eddie Mabo was to be forever...the most important legal decision in Australian History... a turning point after which nothing could be the same again." The high modality of Reynolds' statement suggests how his audience can overcome misguided conformist thinking, proposing that reconciliation is achievable by setting his personal journey to reshape the cultural narrative as an example for others to follow. Similarly, Kirkpatrick urges individuals to instigate political reform to improve the living conditions of asylum seekers. His political agenda and purpose behind creating the documentary is highlighted by the ending scene which calls upon viewers to campaign for a 90-day limit on the imprisonment of asylum seekers. Overall, both Reynolds and Kirkpatrick advocates for socio-political changes towards equality and the sustaining legacy of restoration through their various textual forms.

Through a consideration of textual form, individuals gain an understanding of how composers seek to not only convey their political motives, but also inspires them to adopt their ideologies and instigate changes within society. Both Henry Reynolds' memoir and Heather Kirkpatrick's documentary seek to alter perceptions of Indigenous Australians and asylum seekers respectively by deliberately challenging the status quo and the media's misrepresentations. By using personal anecdotes, both composers encourage individuals to enact positive socio-cultural changes to allow Australia to move forward as a nation.