

Extension 2 English Reflection Statement

Forget.me

*“The Right to Be Forgotten,
the Privilege to Be Remembered”¹*

11242

¹ Raicu 2015

Close your eyes and imagine an ancestor; an extraordinary character whose memory lives on in your family today. Now imagine discovering, through the digital breadcrumbs left by technology, that this relative once had another name and date of birth; another life. You learn that he was a ‘Remittance Man’: paid by his father to leave England and cut contact with his thirteen siblings forever, to spare them the disgrace of his crime. The court records tell you what he did. The ship records tell you the countries he fled to. The newspaper clippings reveal his siblings efforts to track him down. But tell me: what question continues to haunt you?

While for most of my family it was the question of WHY my great grandfather, Harry, did it, I was overwhelmed with questions of HOW. How could Harry change his identity and simply ‘disappear’? How would Harry’s life have played out today had his digital-self precluded redemption from his past? And under today’s all-pervasive eye of technology, how do we balance our, “right to be forgotten (with) the privilege of being remembered?”¹

These are the questions I set out to explore.

Unlike Harry, I have only ever known a world filled with “Smart” technology. Trapped by the utility and familiarity of digital technology, we ‘iGens’² are under constant digital surveillance by having #sharing set as our permanent default. Through the discovery of Harry’s ‘alter life,’ I was struck by the sobering realisation that bygones can no longer be bygones for my ‘Linked-In’ generation which is powerless to erase their digital footprints. In

¹ Raicu 2015

² Goodrebels.com 2017

relinquishing our ‘right to be forgotten,’ we are effectively relinquishing our chance at redemption.

My great-grandfather’s story developed a heightened awareness of the notion of surveillance as a form of social control, and this was deepened by the study of dystopian texts, such as *Nineteen Eight-Four*³ in Extension 1 English. I wanted to explore the personal and social cost of our panoptical ‘on-line’ lives where everything we do is monitored. Through my research and reading of Josh Cohen’s book, *The Private Life*,⁴ I came to understand that when our decisions are limited by the perfect memory of the internet, our sense of self can be diminished and lead to self-doubt internally and self-censorship externally.

Now I began to define my primary purpose. Through the celebration of the life of Harry, one who profited greatly from the cloak of anonymity, I wanted to spark discussion amongst my fellow iGens² aged 16-25 years about the aspects of our identity and the opportunities for redemption we sacrifice, in trading our ‘right to be forgotten’ for the convenience of digital hyper-connectivity. I wanted to demonstrate for my audience that, “It’s being forgotten that’s the wonderful thing.”⁵ I was presented with a way of fulfilling this purpose through my reading of Ruth Praver Jhabvala’s novel, *Heat and Dust*,⁶ in the Discovery Area of Study which opened my eyes to the power of the dual narrative. It occurred to me that I could parallel the voices of characters from the past whose lives were transformed by Harry, with their contemporary, alternate possibilities to showcase what has been lost through the advent

³ Orwell 2009

⁴ Cohen 2013

⁵ Forget.me 2018

⁶ Jhabvala 1975

of technology. My discovery of a website titled, ‘*Forget.me*,’⁷ which is dedicated to protecting people’s ‘right to be forgotten,’ was the inspiration for the title of my Major Work.

I wanted to create a voice that served as a counterpoint to digital dystopias, such as David Eggers’ novel, *The Circle*⁸. My research reassured me that my decision to focus on the beauty of life’s “obscure nooks (where we can be) forgotten even by God”⁹ was a unique approach, as many texts including Nikesh Shukla’s novel, *Meatspace*,¹⁰ represented the issues of loneliness and dehumanisation in our social-media-obsessed society. When my research led me to watch Marshall Jones’ powerful performance of his slam poem, “*Touchscreen*”¹¹ and Gary Turk’s, “*Look up*,”¹² which reached 12 million on YouTube¹³, I was drawn to the form of performance poetry. Although terrified by the demands of poetic conventions, I knew that this form would give me a potent voice to communicate with my audience of young adults used to the fast pace of digital media.

In the Extension 1, ‘After the Bomb’ module, Allen Ginsberg’s “*Howl*” and Bob Dylan’s “*Masters of War*,” deepened my appreciation of the visceral power of ‘written-to-be read’ poetry. It was Dylan’s anti-racism songs, “*Hurricane*,” and “*The Lonesome Death of Hattie Carroll*,” that sparked the idea of having my voice as the narrator of Harry’s story, using a traditional ballad form. Given Australia’s rich tradition in ballad poetry, I was aware that this form may also appeal to a secondary audience of Australians who value and celebrate life’s

⁷ Reputation VIP 2018

⁸ Eggers 2013

⁹ Browning 1835

¹⁰ Shukla 2015

¹¹ Jones 2012

¹² Turk 2014

¹³ Sydney Morning Herald 2014

colourful rogues. In addition to live performances, I hoped to appeal to a wider audience via a podcast on a community radio station such as the 3CR Community Radio poetry program, or via a YouTube video that could appeal to those concerned about the threat to privacy in our digital age.

After researching the conventions of the ballad form,¹⁴ I adopted its rhyming scheme of ABCB for the voice of the narrator and made the decision to appropriate the allegorical ballad, “*The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*.” In referring to myself as the ‘Mariner’ and my audience as the ‘Wedding guest,’ I intended to convey the cautionary tale aspect of *Forget.me* to my audience.

Following my early drafts using predominately the ballad rhyme scheme, I realised that my greatest challenge lay in making a clear distinction between the voices of my characters from the past and their contemporary equivalents. My reading of Gary Shteyngart’s satirical digital dystopia, *Super Sad True Love Story*¹⁵, in which he makes his audience feel like they are, “flicking between Tolstoy and Facebook on an iPad”¹⁶ made it clear to me that each voice needed its own distinctive language. This coincided with my study of Elizabeth Barrett Browning’s poetry in Advanced English Module A, which introduced me to the Petrarchan sonnet. I realised that by appropriating this form, I could create a marked difference in poetic styles between the voice of Harry’s wife, Eileen, from the past and the voice of the modern-day Eileen. I dared to create just one Petrarchan sonnet, adhering to the rhyme scheme of an

¹⁴ Bergman 2018

¹⁵ Shteyngart 2011

¹⁶ Cox 2011

octave of ABBAABBA followed by a sestet of CDCDCD. The result inspired me to contrast poetic styles for other character voices, including the free verse form of the free-spirited Kate and Zoe of old with the rigid ABCB rhyme scheme of their contemporary counterparts. It is a device that, together with the performance aspects, would catalyse the achievement of my ultimate purpose: to shape the audience's understanding of the true worth of our 'right to be forgotten.' This message was foregrounded through the repetition of "forgotten," at the end of each character's narrative section.

A piece of advice by Lowry¹⁷ that resonated with me in my research into the art of spoken word poetry, was the importance of using clear ideas and metaphors because of the audience's inability to re-read ideas missed. In an effort to enhance clarity of ideas, therefore, I selected intertextual references including the 'albatross' from "*The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*," as a motif for Harry's crime, and alluded to William Yeats' poem, 'The Second Coming,' in "that rough beast..come..at last" to denote the apocalyptic impact of technology on our 'right to be forgotten.'

It was apparent through my first recording that the audience may become confused by the interplay of voices. While the use of contrasting poetic styles helped to differentiate the voices from past and present, it was at times still difficult to discern between the characters and the narrator. This prompted me to focus more on the dramatic delivery. I studied the techniques of slam poets, including Kate Tempest's delivery of "*Icarus*,"¹⁸ and Omar Musa in "*My Generation*."¹⁹ By adjusting the pitch, pace, tone, intonation and volume of my voice, I was able to craft a unique voice for each character. I also experimented with the integration

¹⁷ Lowry 2015

¹⁸ Tempest 2011

¹⁹ Musa 2011

of sound bites and special effects, including layering the voice of Harry reading love letters to Eileen behind her proclamation of the inconsequentiality of his “albatross of past.”

The realisation of ‘Forget.me’ has deepened my understanding of the consequences of a world where the Wide Web makes ‘everlasting life’ a reality. By investigating what would have been lost had my great-grandfather’s story been played-out today, I gained a richer understanding of the existential threat to self that emanates from living under the all-pervasive eye of technology. The creation of my Major Work, therefore, facilitates my purpose of raising social consciousness, and challenging my iGen peers to fight for our ‘right to be forgotten’ and strive for the privilege of being remembered.

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