

ENGLISH: *ROMULUS, MY FATHER*

An individual's interaction with others and the world around them can enrich or limit their experience of belonging.

The fundamentals of belonging are inherently evident though the assumptions society makes of human interactions at both a social and individual level – to the extent that not-belonging too becomes a pivotal identity-forming influence. Raimond Gaita's text *Romulus, My Father* demonstrates this idea of belonging in his portrayal of his father within a battle with an exceptionally dissimilar social context to one he has been brought up with. On the contrary, Paul Keating's Redfern Address identifies with societies reaction to multiculturalism and modern day Aboriginal affairs. Ultimately, the concept of belonging cannot exist without the existence of not-belonging.

While the effects of not-belonging vary between individuals, it is common that the long term social isolation and dislocation can have severe implications. *Romulus, My Father*, within *Romulus, My Father*, experiences many difficulties on establishing himself in Maryborough, an isolated town in Australia, a culture whose primary morals often opposed his own upbringing in Romania. Throughout his life, 'he felt like a prisoner in Australia', rather, 'he always considered himself a Romanian'. This is caused partly by the fact that *Romulus* seldom strived to establish an Australian identity. No doubt due to a lack of self-worth within his community, *Romulus* falls into bouts of depression requiring psychiatric care. In a similar fashion, *Romulus* feels the social impact of not belonging, with the failure of several key relationships. The suicide of *Romulus*' wife and Raimond's mother Christine, contributes to *Romulus* unstable mental capacity of which came with conflicting and complex emotions. Raimond from this point lacks the true presence of a maternal figure, ultimately forming both his and his father's identity as one of independence and strength of character.

Multiculturalism prevalent in modern day society attempts to break down complex social barriers as to benefit all present within a society. Paul Keating's Redfern Address deals with aspects of belonging that are current within Australian culture, particularly addressing Aboriginal relations and racial discrimination that have been every present since European settlement. While the speech clearly identifies the ideal motive in ridding the nation of racism, it lacks the substance of action, choosing to admit past mistakes instead of dealing with current ones. This is highlighted with the repetition within 'We brought the disasters. The alcohol. We committed the murders. We took the children from their mothers. We practiced discrimination and exclusivism.' The personal nature of a first person speech adds to the direct sense of belonging which Keating aims to convey to the wider Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community. The false sense of belonging provided within the Redfern Address is conveyed such that the line between belonging and not-belonging is blurred, as part of the political facade of achievement.

For many, belonging comes through the conformity of moral expectations, failing to identify the complexities of belonging in diverse contextual frameworks. Raimond Gaita's text *Romulus, My Father* details *Romulus*' changing state of belonging, contrasting different periods of *Romulus*' own life. His identity, as does his state of belonging, naturally extends during his occupation of Australia. Gaita establishes *Romulus*' dislocation early on in the text with; 'they [Romanians and other foreigners etc] were called the Balts by most Australians'. The context confines *Romulus* to a simple hardworking life, in which he is forced to earn the respect of his peers if he is ever to belong within the Australian community. *Romulus* however maintains his allegiance with his own race of people; he doesn't feel the need to seek the admiration of the people around him, believing in living his life by his own moral standing. Ironically, he gains the acceptance of the Australian community via his strong moral capacity, as evident towards the end of the text with approval shown towards *Romulus*' own eulogy. 'Every word you [Raimond] spoke was true' says Neil Mikkelson, a senior figure within the Maryborough community. Furthermore, the audience experiences *Romulus* state of belonging through his changing approval for Australia. *Romulus*' eventual return to Yugoslavia earlier in the text gives him 'a renewed appreciation of life in Australia'. The social constraints *Romulus* has

placed upon himself have eroded to the extent that they no longer cause him dislocation and disjointment.

The conceptual manipulation of belonging gives way to various interpretations, creating a sense of disillusionment causing disparity and hostility amongst opposing parties. The Redfern Address carefully establishes the nature of discrimination and racial exclusivism that has been ever present since the colonisation of Australia. Keating identifies strongly with a 'bad history', in which an outstanding Australian opinion heavily ostracised all aspects on Indigenous Australian culture, 'we took their land and smashed their traditional way of life'. Furthermore, Keating explains a changing relationship between Aboriginal and non-aboriginal communities in referencing the Mabo decision; 'an historic turning point, the basis of a new relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians.' Again the speech attempts to recognise a form of belonging entailing both a physical and cultural belonging, present 'in the frontier and exploration in Australia... in sport... in literature and art and music.' This aspect is significantly different to that of previous Australian generations, alluding to the fact that perceptions of belonging are subject to social expectations and above all, context.

The state of belonging one holds is most definitely dependent upon the social locale, however it is assumed that not-belonging has the power to empower and disempower individuals due to the very nature of belonging as a pivotal identity forming influence.