

ENGLISH: *ROMULUS, MY FATHER*

Romulus, My Father and Ernest Hemingway

Belonging is an innate and multi-faceted human experience that is derived from the interaction and reaction to other individuals and the wider world. The complex nature of belonging requires intricate linkages to the landscape, individuals and cultural values in order to facilitate its realization. This interpretation permeates throughout; the patriography and memoir, *Romulus, My Father* (RMF) and Ernest Hemingway's Existential short story, *A Clean well-lighted place* (ACWLP Vintage Classics 2004)

RMF suggests that the relationship between external topography and intrinsic topography is conveyed as symbiotic and reciprocal, which denotes self-identification for Raimond. Initially, Raimond suffers from the osmosis of his Father's perspective, which arises as a result of his father's ability to maintain stability in a turbulent childhood. Consequently he develops an idyllic perception of his father, evident in "I loved him too much", which in turn this leads to Raimond "absorbing my father's attitude to the countryside". However he finds the landscape is a catalyst to the transformation of his own identity. The vivid visual imagery and emotive language in describing, 'the scraggy shapes and sparse foliage actually became the foci for my sense of its beauty and everything else fell into place... the experienced transformed my sense of life, adding to both a sense of transcendence' epitomizes that once an understanding of external topography is attained it translates to internal self-identification. Moreover, the composer's use of a metaphorical key ensures that, "my perception of the landscape changed radically", which explicitly expresses that for Gaita the realization of belonging is contained within his experiences with the landscape. A sustained atmosphere of elation and a subsequent development of Gaita's own, individualized identity emphasizes that a relationship with external topography can induce a deeper sense of connection, amplifying our identity.

Paradoxically, 'A Clean well lighted place' suggests that this symbiotic relationship between external and internal topography can also eventuate in isolation and social marginalisation. The protagonist, an elderly man, sits in the proximity of a radiant café in order to alleviate an overwhelmingly disillusioning environment that threatens to overcome him. The motif of light emphasises the significance of a connection to external topography, whereby the protagonist can only truly belong once he reaches the light. However, the elderly man, who fails to move from the "shadow the leaves of the tree made against the electric light", incapacitated by his existential feelings, highlighted in his repetition of 'nada' and an austere tone, connoting a sense of hopelessness in the texts atmosphere. Consequently, his inability to reach the symbolic nature of the light continues his own marginalization, which is strengthened in the texts setting where, "all the tables were empty, except where the old man sat." This poses similarities to *Romulus's* relationship with the landscape, where he also fails to assimilate, instead remaining an "immigrant unused to the tinder-dry conditions of an Australian summer" and "my father always considered himself a Romanian". Thus, the relationship between external topography to internal topography can facilitate self-actualisation or paradoxically marginalisation as it is symbiotic and reciprocal.

Gaita further suggests that cultural values have a symbiotic relationship with internal topography, which ultimately predicates the process of belonging and its importance. Christine's characterisation is utilized as a vehicle to express this representation in the core. The contextual elements of the 1950s are underpinned by a conservative, patriarchal society, whereby the roles of females remain constrained to the cultural paradigms of gender construction and expectations. Consequently, Christine is openly stigmatized for 'her engaging vivacity', which is viewed as "a dangerously seductive manifestation of personality" in a contextual post WWII Australian society. These perceived faults in Christine's personality as a result of changing cultural values create a "landscape that highlighted her isolation", with the composer's descriptive language of her as "lone, small, frail, walking with an uncertain gait and distracted air" consolidating this. Gaita's detached tone and first person perspective in the description of these personal faults helps to effectively explore that "this

emphasis on character, given an Australian accent, provided the wrong conceptual environment for her to find herself and for others to understand her.” This creates a tension between her and the community, leading to Tom Lille and others having a “intense dislike for my mother”. Consequently, this culminates in an attempted suicide from a drug overdose, as her isolation is exacerbated by the fact that “she longed for company”. Thus, contextual values impede Christine’s ability to develop positive relationships, which in turn, prevents factors and experiences providing a sense of belonging.

Alternatively, in ACWLP Hemingway constructs an environment devoid of meaning in order to elucidate that without meaningful connections a sense of nothingness is all pervasive. The ramifications of this for the protagonist, and to lesser extent the middle aged waiter, are extensive substance abuse and attempted suicide, which is paradoxically over “nothing”. The appropriation of the Lord’s Prayer, subverted with a cumulative use of ‘nada’, and a minimalist dialogue provide an atmosphere indicative of nihilism, which provides an impossible backdrop to forge a sense of belonging. The older waiter’s scepticism of god as an omnipotent presence in his interior monologue consolidates the idea that an overwhelming sense worthlessness from disillusionment with life will impede self-identification. Ironically, this hopelessness becomes “not a fear or dread” but instead an eternal nothingness rationalized as “probably only insomnia”. Hemingway’s use of nameless, normalized characters from ranging ages, against a nighttime setting in a foreign country is utilized to solidify this as a ubiquitous theme for belonging. Therefore, both ACWLP and Christine in RMF expose that individuals divested of meaningful relationships will ultimately descend into a state of hopelessness, providing an environment that is not conducive to self-actualization or belonging.