

ENGLISH: *IMMIGRANT CHRONICLE*

Immigrant Chronicle

A sense of belonging is paramount to the development of an individual. Without it we often find we experience a sense of alienation from those around us, as well as ourselves. This sense of belonging is often enriched or limited through our interactions with the world around us. Peter Skrzynecki's *Immigrant Chronicle*, in particular the poems, 'Feliks Skrzynecki' and '10 Mary Street', explores the idea of belonging to culture and locality. In the novel *When Rain Clouds Gather* by Bessie Head, Head further extrapolates on the ideas of belonging to culture and locality and further challenges these accepted notions.

An individual often feels a sense of belonging to his or her culture, and through this a feeling of freedom is often achieved. In 'Feliks Skrzynecki', the poet uses the symbolism of his father "Keeping pace with the Joneses ... minds making" to emphasise the insular approach his father takes to life and how this has contributed to a sense of harmony. Even with his migration from Poland to Australia, Feliks is still capable of holding onto powerful memories of belonging to place which is implicitly acknowledged by Skrzynecki through the use of listing imagery, "Farms where paddocks flowered with corn ... Pigs," which is reminiscent of the "Old culture." Further adding to this is the connotations the words themselves carry, for example "Watched the stars ... come on"; particularly significant as stars, and light in general signify freedom and peace; paralleling his father's own experiences of belonging.

Antithetically to this, Skrzynecki feels a deep sense of alienation from his father, and on extension his Polish heritage as his father 'Feliks Skrzynecki' is in fact a motif for this old culture. This exclusion is underscored by the symbolism of Skrzynecki "Pegging his tents further and further south of Hadrian's Wall." Hadrian's Wall as built by the Emperor Hadrian to keep out the British "savages". Therefore in this case, the wall is not only representative of the barrier Skrzynecki faces, but also the fact that Skrzynecki regresses from his past, rather than challenging it. Skrzynecki also uses the juxtaposition "Happy as I have never been," to further contrast and highlight his sense of unhappiness and dejection to his father's acceptance and happiness.

Diametrically opposed to this is Head's protagonist, Makhaya; who finds freedom and acceptance in an escape from his culture and the stranglehold it has on him. This strangle hold is initially portrayed to us through the rhetorical questions posed to us by Makhaya. "Why should men be brought up with a false sense of superiority over women?" and "He could not marry or have children in a country where black men were called 'boy' and 'dog' and "kaffir". Makhaya, later in the novel further emphasises this point through the recurring motif of men seen as nothing more than 'sex organs or 'Black Dogs'. Both of these terms are symbolic of the negative and tribalistic view held of the current "black man" and it is this view that we find Makhaya trying to escape. We see Makhaya strive to break away from his culture due to these limited experiences of belonging which is evident through the shortening of his name to 'Mack', for Gilbert (who is a white man) whom Makhaya goes on to befriend. Ignoring the befriending of a white man, the shortening of his name, along with the accompanying phrase to Gilbert "it's just a tribal name" is symbolic of Makhaya actively choosing to alienate himself from his previous culture, in which names and the tribe you came from were considered paramount. Further contributing to this self inflicted alienation is the fact that Makhaya becomes friends with a white man, and goes on to introduce various agricultural initiatives, such as growing millet crops, "Traditionally grown by inferior tribes." However, this is where the key difference lies between Makhaya and Skrzynecki. Skrzynecki finds that his lack of connection to "his" Polish ancestry is a barrier to achieving any harmony in life, unless he can understand or come to terms with it. Makhaya is the exact opposite, finding that in order to belong, instead of trying to embrace his culture he must alienate it and move forward. Both of these examples nevertheless demonstrate that limited interactions with those around us can influence our sense of belonging and that the key to progressing in life is to find an inner and external peace.

A sense of belonging may also be associated with a locality and the culture associated with it. Skrzynecki in '10 Mary Street' extrapolates on this through the metaphor of the "Key under the rusty bucket", and furthermore through the symbolism of being the "Inheritors of the key ... pulled down". The key represents the last vestiges of the Skrzyneckis' culture, and by "Each morning hiding this key under a rusty bucket," the Skrzyneckis show that while they may "belong" within the house they do not fit into the world outside it. By inheriting this key "That opens no other doors," Skrzynecki highlights that they belong solely to this locality and its culture and that 'the key' and their ways are not compatible with any other culture. This sense of belonging is strengthened through the repetition of "19 years" and in one case immediately after the repetition; extensive listing of cultural habits associated with their Polish heritage.

Contrastingly, Makhaya finds freedom in an escape from his homeland. This is illustrated at the beginning of the novel, when Makhaya is trying to escape from South Africa into Botswana. Head provides us with imagery of "A half mile gap of no man's land to the Botswana border fence" and Makhaya crouching in a small hut. This imagery of the border strip is synonymous with the last lines of Feliks Skrzynecki, "Pegging my tent...wall". The imagery of the border strip further serves to accentuate the barrier towards belonging much like, "Hadrian's wall". However, the critical difference is that while Skrzynecki views the 'wall' as a barrier preventing him from attaining a connection with his own culture, Makhaya views the 'border' as a barrier preventing him from escaping the stranglehold his culture has on him.

Both Skrzynecki and Head have shown that interactions one has with the world around them can either uplift or destroy their sense of belonging. At the same time people's perceptions of belonging and what must be done to belong can be different. This is illustrated best in the two completely different approaches that Skrzynecki and Makhaya take in order to achieve a sense of belonging as well as what the two consider to be barriers to achieving this peace.