

# Belonging – romulus my father further arrivals essay

[Sociology](#), [Identity](#)



A person's identity is quite often reflected and shaped through one's own personal understanding of where they belong in a social society. A sense of belonging is usually driven by the external and internal factors that occupy around them. In our quest to belong we will experience both opportunities and disappointments. It can be both a self-fulfilling and self-destructive part of life. Furthermore it relies on conformity and individuality, yet the bigger the group, the smaller the individuality. Raimond Gaita's biographical memoir "Romulus, My Father" and Margaret Atwood's poem "Further Arrivals" clearly demonstrate similar concepts of how a person's sense of belonging shapes their identity. Both of the texts have a strong emphasis on place and setting through the use of imagery and symbolism and both use the harsh Australian immigration of European foreigners to convey the fact that, from suffering, wisdom is gained. "Despite an individual's desire to belong to a group or community, this is not always possible."

An individual's concept or opinion of belonging may differ and cause debate, however inevitably belonging is an instinctive human need in all of us. In the beautifully constructed prose "Romulus, My Father," Gaita explores the impact of immigration within his family, their sense of displacement and the quest of understanding their sense of place within society, ultimately building valued identities. Our own individual understanding of our self through adversity is also poetically conveyed through Margaret Atwood's "Further Arrivals".

This poem seeks to convey the notion of difficulty of the immigrant experience, from displacement to the path of understanding one's self in foreign surroundings. Both composers seek to convey the difficulty of

assimilation and coping with change, subsequently exposes that the path to understanding one's self is forged by a desire to belong. The autobiographical nature of Raimond Gaita's "Romulus, My Father" offers an unmediated and bracing exploration of the self. Raimond Gaita's father, Romulus, "longed for the generous and soft European foliage, the eucalyptus of Baringhup, scraggy except for the noble gums on the river bank, seemed symbols of deprivation and bareness".

This emotive language characterises and symbolises the fact that Romulus' radical change of leaving his home country has left him in a state of pain, sorrow and discontent through not belonging. Furthermore, Romulus' suffering is shown in the quote "My Father must have been heartbroken by his unfaithful wife." Gaita uses emotive language to convey a deep sense of agony inside his father [Romulus]. As an immigrant in pre-multicultural Australia, it was a must to realign their sense of self in order to belong. When Romulus was sentenced to two years of labour for his boat trip; he "had long come to accept what fate dealt him... so he saw his two years as a short interim.

"Along with how nobody called him by his name, they instead "called him Jack", was a true test of his character. He truly obliged and in the end he finally created a sense of belonging within the community when he put his creative and hardworking hands to use. Inevitably, the book is culminated with the quote, "Some kinds of wisdom, however, are given only to those have suffered deep and long." A sense of not belonging is similarly present within Raimond's mother, Christina. The fact that Christina never felt or had

a sense of belonging for Australia shaped her very unpleasant and poor character. This is shown through the quote, " A dead red gum stood only one hundred meters from the house and became for my mother a symbol of her desolation". This symbolic envisagement of her not belonging is a consequential thought into the unpleasant nature and poor attitude of Christine. The isolation of " a dead red gum" exemplifies that of Christina's isolation from society, whilst the environment in which the tree is situated in is what killed it.

Similarly, the environment in which Christina finds herself inevitably in is a factor that leads to her suicide. This recurring motif of suicide enlightens the negative consequences of alienation on an individual's sense of self. This again shows that belonging is what you make of it.

An individual's sense of identity is perpetuated by one's correlation to their community and its physical surroundings. Being an immigrant, Romulus gains the cognition of his community and surroundings by proving his " worth" through hard honest work. The use of personification in " His materials...seemed to be in friendship with him" is used to strengthen the bond that already exists between Romulus and his work. This accentuates the significance of such conjunction on the evolvment of his " character". His sense of belonging to his work has a significant connection to his strong character and this is inherited by Raimond who quotes " I know what a good workman is, I know what an honest man is. I know because I remember these things in the person of my father". The use of repetition emphasises

and augments his father's life and it proves that you can also belong to your family and shape your character based on who you were raised by.

Gaita contemplates that belonging to one's community is essential as it benefits identity, while a lack of it [belonging] has serious and detrimental effects on an individual's sense of self. During Gaita's journey through life, much of the agony he experienced came from when something that was common to him transformed into something very different. For example, both his father's madness and his mother's mental illness [and eventual suicide] made Raimond irrepressible and made his migration to Australia a successful one, thus, giving him a sense of belonging. Usually when there is suffering, wisdom is being created. Raimond also learns though the wisdom that his father had gained through suffering that hardship and the quest to find a sense of belonging creates character. Romulus came from a very much divided Europe, where there was a shortage of food, education and freedom. The hardships he experienced were nourished and through them his spirit became as strong as the steel he tempered. He had become a man of character.

There's positives and negatives to everything in life, it's a matter of how you react to them which makes your character. The quest to "belong" isn't always easy but each lesson you learn must be taken as something truly valuable and it's how you deal with each situation that shapes your identity. Somewhat desolate and bleak, Margaret Atwood's poem "Further Arrivals" poetically conveys the notion of a rough immigration and the ultimate challenge to belong and accept one's self. The quote "The Immigrants threw

off their clothes and danced like sandflies” symbolises how her immigration at first seemed like a new and exciting life was being born.

Her deep sense of excitement quickly shafted into a state of uncertainty when they “ entered a large darkness,” her sense of belonging became unknown and her identity had been swiftly erased. Atwood re-iterates the fact that she was now in a land of unknown and uncertainty. She symbolises this through the quote “ It was our own ignorance we had entered” – meaning they had entered a place in which they knew very little about but acted as if they did. Her sense of belonging was gone and it had soon shaped her identity into being one of the unknown and unpleasant. The metaphor “ My Brain gropes nervous.. tentacles in the night.

. sends out fears hairy as bears,.. demand lamps; or waiting” clearly demonstrates her displeasure and discomfort. Atwood also uses strong imagery in the quote to demonstrate how startled and discontent she was. If a person’s sense of belonging is gone, it will shape their identity into one of the unknown and discontent. This is proven through the quote “ I refuse to look in a mirror.

This statement uses symbolism to suggest that without a sense of belonging, your identity disappears and you can’t accept yourself. A mirror symbolises who you are and if you are not willing to look into one, it clearly suggests that you do not accept yourself. The last stanza of the poem strongly conveys that unless you adapt to life in an environment, you will never feel an identity or a sense of belonging. Thus, ultimately embracing the main

ideal that a person's sense of belonging shapes their identity. Belonging is what you make of it.

The hunger to belong is not merely a desire to be attached to something. It is rather sensing that great transformation and discovery become possible when belonging is sheltered and true. A person's sense of belonging shapes their identity. These ideals are depicted in Raimond Gaita's "Romulus, my Father" and Margaret Atwood's "Further Arrivals". Despite one individual's understanding of belonging differing to another individual's understanding, does not mean one is wrong, it simply means that certain people find acceptance and security in different places.