

Romulus, my father and neighbours



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Belonging manifests in our abilities to connect with people and places, locations and landscapes provide a tangible representation of our intangible feelings of belonging, while relationships and connections to people provide the social security and support that is essential to human nature. Romulus, My Father, a biographical memoir written by Raimond Gaita, explores these concepts of how connections to people and place, or lack thereof, can have dramatic and detrimental consequences on our wellbeing.

This is particularly explored in the characters Christine and Romulus, who each experience an absence of belonging in their relationships with people and place. As well as this, Romulus, My Father demonstrates how belonging to place can be affected by our relationships with people. These ideas are similarly explored in the short story, Neighbours by Tim Winton, which explores the difficulties faced by a couple in settling into a neighbourhood of immigrants. Developing strong relationships with other people can lead us to define our own personalities and actions.

However, in Romulus, My Father, the connections shared between family and friends constantly encounters various troubles and difficulties surrounding them, consequently many of these people experience problems develop in their own well-being. The relationship between Romulus and Christine, resolves itself in a detrimental manner, and consequently Raimond himself is even affected, this is demonstrated in the constant sidelining of his mother's perspective and mental illnesses, while glorifying and excusing the actions of his father, as a result of his mother's abandonment of their family.

Even when Christine is first introduced, she is described as “ well-educated, interested in theatre, reads Shakespeare in translation and likes opera”, which Romulus “ mistook... for snobbishness, a fault he detested even then, but indulged in her because he loved her”. At the beginning of their relationship, Romulus places a negative judgement on Christine, but casts aside these traits selflessly in order to indulge in her, an action that is an early sign of their turbulent relationship.

Romulus’ heroic descriptions of his father are often hyperbolised, “ He was able to make almost anything to the most exacting standards, and his work was unsurpassed in quality and speed... my father worked furiously, doing in an afternoon the work it normally took two men a full day to complete. ”, placing emphasis on the deep awe and respect that Raimond developed for his father, while also emphasising the bond between father and son, due to a lack of any emotional connection with his mother.

The text, Neighbours, explores similar ideas of issues with relationships to people, and consequently with place. Although the effects of this are not nearly as detrimental on the main couples physical and mental wellbeing, they do, however, experience a sense of isolation and alienation. “ The young man and woman had lived all their lives in the expansive outer suburbs where good neighbours were seldom seen and never heard.

The sounds of spitting and washing and daybreak watering came as a shock. ”, unaccustomed to the traditions of the immigrants, the use of simple imagery of daily activities is juxtaposed with the shock experienced by the couple, placing them in a position as outsiders rather than the immigrants.

Our sense of belonging to place, and our state of well-being can easily be determined by the state of our relationship and depth of connection with the people in that place.

For Romulus and Christine, a connection to the Australian landscape is hardly ever established; they constantly feel displaced and foreign away from their familiar European environment. However, due to Raimond's constantly forming attitude towards the landscape, he eventually begins to feel a sense of connection and belonging with his natural environment. " I had absorbed my father's attitude to the countryside, especially to its scraggy trees, because he talked so often of the beautiful trees of Europe.

" Romulus' attitude towards the Australian landscape remain unchanged due to his life spent living in Europe and his initial belonging in Yugoslavia, whereas Raimond begins to develop a connection to the Australian landscape. This is emphasised in his use of detailed visual imagery, " But now, for me, the key to the beauty of the native trees lay in the light which so sharply delineated them against a dark blue sky", Raimond demonstrates an understanding, almost like an epiphany, of the harsh Australian landscape.

However, Raimond experiences further difficulties in belonging to place, due to his father's unstable wellbeing and his own bond with his father. " My father's vulnerability changed my attitude to Frogmore. In his sighs I heard our isolation and for the first time I felt estranged from the area". The metaphor of feeling of isolation contained in Romulus' sighs, sustains the

idea that his Raimond's personal connection to land can be governed by the emotion of his father due to their close bond.

Tim Winton uses a closely related idea, in that the lack of personal connections and relationships with those around you can place you in state of isolation and alienation. " When they first moved in, the young couple were wary of the neighbourhood. The street was full of European migrants. It made the newly? weds feel like sojourners in a foreign land. " The use of a simile, comparing the young couple to travellers in a foreign place, highlights the alienation the couple feels while they lack any established relationship with their neighbours, even while in their " home" country

Romulus, My Father effectively demonstrates the fundamental nature of human relationships, both with people and place in order to sustain our wellbeing. This idea is demonstrated in the detrimental consequences that result when a lack of connection between people occur, specifically between the initial family, Romulus, Christine and Raimond. With the use of Raimond's and Romulus' intense father-son bond, the memoir also explores the effect of personal connections on our ability to belong to a specific environment and place.