

Romulus, my father – essay

[Family](#), [Father](#)



Explore how perceptions of belonging and not belonging can be influenced by connections to places in Romulus, My Father. An individual's capacity to belong is primarily dependent on their personal experience, and varies in difficulty depending on the dynamics of each individual's personality and temperament. The landscape in which an individual resides has a definitive impact upon an individual's sense of belonging. Furthermore, the specific place, in relation to where the individual literally resides, too influences one's sense of belonging.

In Raimond Gaita's biographical memoir Romulus, My Father, the notion of belonging is strongly influenced by place. Both belonging and not belonging are explored through the characters' sense of place, Romulus and Christine respectively. Romulus is able to successfully transition from Yugoslavia to Australia as he effectively endeavours to integrate his native culture – through Slivovitz, Yugoslavian friends and his native trade – into his newfound home. In contrast, Christine is unable to find any means of connection to the place or landscape and as a result becomes alienated.

Raimond connects to place in his own unique way, using the landscape of rural Australia as a metaphor for belonging and subsequently finding a 'place to call home'. Ultimately, Romulus, My Father explores the powerful influence that place holds over an individual's sense of belonging. Throughout Raimond Gaita's Romulus, My Father, Romulus Gaita's sense of belonging is heavily influenced through a connection to place and landscape. Born in Yugoslavia, Romulus emigrated on an assisted passage in 1950 at the age of 28, with his young wife Christine and their four-year-old son Raimond soon after the end of World War II.

While the transition between countries can often hold harsh and ominous repercussions on an individual's sense of self, Romulus seems to successfully establish himself within the Australian community. Foremost, Romulus does so through an integration of his native culture. Immediately upon arriving at Baringhup in order to work, Romulus specifically seeks out his fellow Romanians and ultimately finds them in Hora and Mitru. Furthermore, his frequent drinking of Slivovitz, a Romanian brandy, coupled with his commitment to the trade he perfected in Romania highlights his commitment to his native country.

This patriotism is ultimately accepted by the individuals Romulus associates with, and as a result strengthens his sense of belonging. The landscape of the Australian outback also has an impact on Romulus' sense of belonging. Raimond often reflects on how Romulus feels isolated from the world, as a result of being away from the wintry forests of Europe. The effect is a slight diminution of Romulus' sense of belonging as he at times longs to return to Yugoslavia.

The peppercorn tree, situated in Frogmore, symbolises Romulus' tether between his desire to return to Yugoslavia and his current location of Australia as it represents his native country, albeit located in his newfound home. Christine, Romulus' wife, in contrast to Romulus himself, has her sense of belonging wrought through a disconnection towards place and landscape. It is evident at the beginning of the memoir that Christine feels a lack of belonging through living in Germany and as a result is the driving force behind the Gaita's move to Australia.

This act shows Christine's inability to stay and commit to one place. Even upon arriving in Australia, Christine displays an inability to connect with the place she resides, and furthermore the landscape she is presented with. Despite only leaving Europe recently, Christine too seems to feel isolated by the Australian outback. The rural Australian landscape of Frogmore ultimately becomes too much for Christine, who subtly still longs for the winterly forests of Europe.

Whether it is a result of her unaccepted values in the eyes of the local community, her largely misunderstood mental illness or a strong disconnection to place and landscape, Christine is constantly on the move, which further highlighting her temporary nature. Time after time, Christine feels alienated by the landscape she surrounds herself with and ultimately feels the need to escape the alienation for good, resulting in her suicide. The dead red gum tree becomes a metaphor for her desolation, oppression and inability to become accustomed to the land.

The tree, like Christine, is of complete contrast to its landscape; drawing parallels to Christine's alienation. " The scraggy gum delineated against a dark blue backdrop of a sky. " Raimond is able to fashion his own sense of belonging through place in a way this is distinctively different from Romulus and Christine. The distinctive difference between Raimond and his parents is that Raimond is able to grow up in Australia. This ultimately has a major impact upon the way place shapes his sense of belonging. Raimond embraces his Australian environment, most notably through his school.

Raimond, once again unlike his parents, is able to fully embrace the Australian culture without any significant ties to the European culture. It is in

this way that Raimond is able to fully feel at home within the landscape of the rural Australian outback. Raimond relishes the rural landscape, which is further explored during his epiphany. Ultimately, an individual's capacity to belong is primarily dependent on their personal experience. However, the difficulties in belonging are derived from the dynamics of an individual's personality as their subjective perceptions of themselves and their surrounds influence their capacity to belong.

Raimond Gaita's memoir, *Romulus, My Father* depicts the varying difficulties in belonging through the parallel portrayal of Christine and Raimond; asserting that Christine's temporary nature prevented her from achieving a sense of belonging. Raimond's sense of belonging is shaped through coming to terms with his bucolic setting, in contrast to the innate connection to the land of his father. Thus, belonging is seen as a subjective notion whereby the hazards and difficulties of achieving belonging are varied dependent on the dynamics of the individual's personality and temperament.