

Identity-belonging



An individual's sense of belonging is shaped by their own identity.

Humans are seen as highly social creatures and their own identity is a major feature in their well being and sense of belonging. An individual's identity is characterised by aspects such as their values, customs and heritage which either enriches or limits their sense of belonging.

An individual may also shape their own identity in order to satisfy the universal human desire to belong. However it is also true to state that external factors alter a person's identity as well as their sense of belonging. These concepts are expressed in the poem, 'Feliks Skrzynecki' by Peter Skrzynecki. The poem 'Feliks Skrzynecki' presents the poet's father's alienation within Australian society as a result of his predominantly Polish identity. This is contrasted with Peter's diminished connection to Polish culture and the affiliation to Australian Culture. Twice the poet presents the garden as the father's personal world where 'he swept its path/ Ten times around the world'.

The use of hyperbole adds to the definitive boundary between Australian and Polish culture as defined by Feliks while also highlights that Feliks never felt he had a place in Australian culture. Hence the poet uses the Australian idiom of 'keeping pace only with the Joneses' where the father is able to ignore the influence of the outside world while maintaining a strong Polish identity. In the second last stanza the poet makes reference to Feliks' happiness, 'happy as I have never been', which is a result of the father's connection to his garden. Likewise in the second stanza the notion of maintaining a Polish identity and a sense of connection to Feliks' past is illustrated by the poet in 'from the soil he turned/ And the tobacco he

rolled.??? However to the poet it was the traditions when Feliks??™ ??? Polish friends??? met that stood out and allowed Feliks to be more at home in Australia.

??? Feliks Skrzynecki/ That formal address/ That I never got used to??? and ??? shook hands too violently??? were several routines that characterised ??? polish friends??? reunion. In addition these provided Feliks??™ own identity within the group allowing him to have a sense of belonging. However, his polish heritage is suggested to be the curse ??? that damned a??| department clerk??? whom asked ??? Did your father ever attempt to learn English??? This rhetorical question emphasises Feliks??™ lack of belonging within Australian society due to his polish identity. This poem is not only about Feliks??™ sense of belonging to polish culture as a result of his polish ancestry, it also concerns the consequences of this polish ancestry. In this poem the most significant relationship is between father and son. The filial relationship is Peter??™s connection to his father??™s polish culture and established in the praising opening line ??? My gentle father???. The historical metaphor at the end of the poem of ??? pegging my tents further and further south of Hadrian??™s wall???, demonstrates the ever increasing divide between father and son which diminishes the poet??™s affiliation to his polish heritage.

In addition the father is compared to a ??? dumb prophet??? he is unable to communicate as a result of his poor English and the son??™s ??? remnants of [the polish] language???. As the poet??™s sense of belonging to his father diminishes so too does his polish identity. The poet??™s sense of place in Australian culture affects the relationship as well as the poet??™s sense of

belonging to the Polish culture. This establishes that he was not quite so content with his Polish heritage, unlike Feliks who was ??? Happy as I have never been???. The alienation from Polish traditions, is further highlighted through the ironic line ??? stumbling over tenses in Caesar??™s Gallic War???. It is ironic in that he has not completely grasped the Polish language and ??? forgot [his] first Polish word??? at the age of thirteen while learning a different language. Peter??™s lack of understanding and knowledge of his ancestral language, customs, values and so on, reduces his affiliation to it.

His predominantly Australian identity prevents his sense of place and belonging to his heritage. The poem ??? Feliks Skrzynecki??? highlights the father's Polish identity allows him to belong within a group of friends while being alienated within Australian society. In addition the garden as a sanctuary from the world also allows Feliks to experience a sense of belonging. However this is contrasted with that of the poet who is unable to completely associate with his Polish heritage. ??? Feliks Skrzynecki??? portrays that there are many factors which influence an individual??™s sense of belonging, namely identity is a predominant aspect.