

Belonging denotes the human propensity to establish connections within a milieu in order to conceive emotional stability and security.

Identity is a fundamental facet from which a sense of purpose and connection is derived. Raimond Gaita's novel Romulus my Father, evinces the relationship between an individual's identity and ability to facilitate a sense of affiliation. T.S Elliot's poem The Lovesong of J Alfred Prufrock mutually parallels this notion by conveying the alienation and deterioration of relationships, caused by the repression of individual identity. Elliot's text also reflect the detachment caused by social change within a transient environment, whilst Gaita's text fixates on the negative ramifications of an affinity to location, severed during sudden migration. Despite their textual disparities, both texts convey the importance of a strong sense of identity and connection to place in enabling an individual to forge a rigid sense of affiliation.

Attempting to belong can be described as a balance between upholding and sacrificing individuality in order to facilitate acceptance.

Gaita's text reflects how being dedicated to one's convictions and identity, instead of conforming to external expectations, impacts a sense of connection. From the text's onset, Romulus' identity is prominently established and maintained through his work; a metaphor for his character. His work is driven by choice, providing him with a sense of affiliation, as it is completed to "exacting standards", "unsurpassed in quality." This work ethic is projected through Gaita's unique expression of the onomatopoeic rhythm of Romulus' hammer, "tap tap bang, tap tap bang"; a skill which later serves as a vehicle Romulus employs to gain acceptance in the community. Romulus stringency however, also sometimes impairs his ability to "distinguish statements of intentions from promises," leading to unintentional alienation, reflecting how a strong sense of individualism may also negatively impact an individual's ability to affiliate. This contrasts with Elliot's persona Prufrock; the antithesis of Romulus who embodies an unidentified identity due to his inability to forge connections in a modernistic society. Elliot's artistic allusion, "There will be time... to prepare a face to meet the faces that you meet," and repetition of, "...the women come and go, talking of Michelangelo," is symbolic of Prufrock's sculpting of a superficial identity at the expense of his dignity and individuality. By utilising a crab as a metaphor for Prufrock; an animal stuck in a lateral state of motion, Elliot reflects Prufrock's struggle to gain acceptance through this constant revision of his identity, "a pair of ragged claws. Scuttling across the floors.." and that fact that he has completely forsaken his former identity in a futile attempt to be accepted. Both Romulus an Prufrock exhibit two extremes; Romulus possesses an erudite, rigid sense of individualism, whilst Prufrock completely lacks any sense of identity; undefined, thus emphasising the importance of this balance that belonging denotes to a person's ability to connect. Hence, Elliot's, and Gaita's texts mutually explore the notion of identity, challenging and reinforcing this concept through their different representations of belonging.

An affinity to place and its importance is an additional notion elucidated through Elliot's poem. J Alfred Prufrock never successfully forges a societal affiliation. During the text's onset, the instructional dialogue, "Let us go then, you and I, When the evening is spread across the sky," indicates Prufrock's plans to explore his domain with a romantic interest, in the possibility of conceiving a sense of connection. This prospect is subsequently discarded as an internal colloquy, as the kinesthetic imagery of the simile "Like a patient etherised upon a table," reinforces his disconnection. Although Prufrock desires the modernistic women of his milieu, he finds them impossible to relate to. Elliot's biblical comparison of Prufrock's attempt at a relationship to "Lazarus," coming "back from the dead," conveys his consequential emotional estrangement

which is accentuated by the repetition of, "It is impossible to say what I mean." Prufrock's segregation in Elliot's poem is further emphasised through the use of synecdoches; portraying the women he desires in fractured segments instead of whole individuals, "I have known the arms already... Arms that are braceleted and white and bare." In Gaita's text, Romulus' and Christine's initial disconnection to the Australian landscape, mirrors the atmosphere of Elliot's poem, conveyed through Gaita's reflection, "Though the landscape was one of rare beauty, to a European or English eye it seems desolate..". This is a paragon of the over-arching theme of the refugee experience; a once existent affinity to location now severed, no longer enriching, but limiting an individual's capacity to establish connections with their new location. This is further emphasised by Gaita's description of Christine as, "a troubled city girl," who couldn't settle in "a landscape that highlighted her isolation," as well as the emblematic "dead red gum," which became for ..[Christine] a symbol of her desolation." Furthermore, just as Prufrock falsely reaffirms himself that he will indeed establish a societal connection and woo the women he desires, Christine similarly compensates her tormenting deracination through her promiscuity and neglect of care towards Raimond reflected in Gaita's memoir, "my mother had other lovers and he was tormented by jealousy," and, "She seemed incapable of taking care of me.." This fuels Romulus' "hostility towards her [Christine]," and resultant disconnection and dysfunctional nature of the Gaita family impedes the internal sense of connection on which families thrive. However Raimond's affinity to the land contrastingly counteracts this undermining, as the metamorphosis of his perceptions of his environment are reflected through the tranquil visual imagery accompanying his epiphany, " My perception of the landscape changed radically...", "The scraggy shapes and sparse foliage actually became the foci for my sense of beauty." Thus, all both texts demonstrate the significance of possessing a connection to place and the negative emanations ensuing when such an affinity is non existential or feeble.

In conclusion, Gaita's, Elliot's texts all examine how a sense of belonging can emanate or deteriorate depending on the presence of a rigid sense of identity and the possession of a connection with a location; whether metaphorical or physical.