

Discuss the significance of the past and its memories in the poetry of Peter Skrzynecki.

Memories of the migrant experience allows Skrzynecki to reflect on their origins and the emotionally arduous journey which they undertook and their means of dealing with intense sadness

Emphasises the importance of mutual support and dealing with the hurdles in one's life

- Nationalities sought each other out instinctively / like a homing pigeon
- Lives that had just begun or were slowly dying
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Understanding the past in order to hone one's identity:

- Ancestors - comprehension of the lives forgone in their familial lineage is vital
- My father's hammer- wondering why it had to be transported

If one is not deeply-rooted and hold strong memories of the past they are more comfortable assimilating to the Australian mores.

- Parents 'kept pre-war Europe alive / with photographs and letters / heated discussions/ and embracing gestures'
- 'remnants of a language I inherited unknowingly' 'I forgot my first word'
- 'watched me pegging my tents / further and further south of Hadrian's wall'

In Peter Skrzynecki's highly contemplative collection of poems, *Old/New World*, the poet delves into events of the past, which have shaped his existence and his progression from immaturity to enlightenment. This notion of intellectual development is intimated through recollections of his migration ordeal, seeking comprehension and guidance from his forbearers and his ability to assimilate to Australian mores due to his relatively shallow footing in Polish culture. The accumulative effect of the poet's memories are paramount in fashioning his full-grown self.

Skrzynecki presents the migration experience as emotionally turbulent for the diaspora of migrants from war-torn Europe, this allows for rumination about the means of overcoming the adversities associated with this voyage. Undoubtedly, there is an overwhelming sense of sadness that this event imbues. In the poem 'Immigrants at Central Station', 'it was sad to hear / the train's whistle' when at the 'railway' whilst it 'rained'. This accentuates the emotions of *zal* – deep sorrow and depression. Not only is this onomatopoeic description an articulation of their lament, the assonance of singular words resonates a wail and thus it channels the inner desolation. Skrzynecki underscores the methods taken to overcome these emotions. In 'Migrant Hostel', the poet recalls that 'Nationalities sought / each other out instinctively'. The caesura and enjambment stresses that despite the lack of security and uncertainty they individual's possessed a natural 'instinct' to seek similar individuals in order to forge a sense of belonging in a time of great insecurity. In addition to this, Skrzynecki highlights that despite the strong emotions they stomached the 'hunger and hate' and that their 'lives had just begun / or were slowly dying'. This realisation is tinted with a nuance of finality as this is symbolic of the severance from their past existence in Europe. Essentially, Skrzynecki highlights the pragmatic attitude exhibited to surmount these adversities. Therefore, the emotions and events associated with immigration are all vital learning experiences, which mould Skrzynecki during his juvenescence.

In addition to the notion of forging one's identity, Skrzynecki postulates that in order to truly ascertain understanding of individuality, consultation with ancestral lineage is crucial. During Skrzynecki's development he is seemingly unworldly. In the enigmatic poem, 'Ancestors', majority of the stanzas are interrogatives - suggestive of his attempt of gaining an insightful understanding. The poet questions their ancestor's existence by questioning 'Who are these shadows/ that hang over you in a dream – the bearded, faceless men'. This enjambed statement accentuates the speaker's natural current of thought as he questions the anonymous 'faceless men' and disturbing

presence of the poet's forbearers as they 'hang over' him. Additionally, the speaker questions 'Where do they point to/ from the circle around you - / to what star do their footprints lead?'. This testifies that Skrzynecki believes that his forefathers are able to offer him substantial guidance. Thereby, the poet posits that consideration of his past is crucial in his self-establishment. By the same token, in a more lucid manner Skrzynecki also attempts to gain a more holistic understanding of his father. In the lyrical and meditative poem 'My Father's Hammer'. The poet confesses that although he knew 'how (the hammer) helped to reshape (his father's) life... (he) wishes (he'd) asked him more about it' and regretfully notes that '(he) never asked him why / (the hammer has to be transported)'. Thus the poet acknowledges his sense of regret of not attaining a thorough understanding of his father. Essentially, Skrzynecki underscores understanding the past, which is inextricably intertwined with the present and fills in the gaps in one's identity and belonging.

Furthermore, unlike his parents who possess a well-defined sense of identity, thereby due to his indistinct association with his European practices and customs he is able to gradually assimilate to the Australian civilisation. In the prosaic poem '10 Mary Street', Skrzynecki presents a series of vignettes of household happenings. His parent's substantial attachment to their cultural past is underlined by the poet, who recalls that they 'kept pre-war Europe alive / with photographs and letters, / heated discussions / and embracing gestures'. The enjambment mirrors the tumbling nature of these memories, which they are so strongly invested in and fond of. Similar to a degree, a minor fraction of the European lifestyle was imparted upon Skrzynecki as in 'Feliks Skrzynecki', the poet possessed 'remnants of a language / (he) inherited unknowingly'. However, as this cultural connection is relatively weak, but nevertheless present as he 'inherited (it) unknowingly' this bond progressively deteriorates as '(he) forgot (his) first Polish word'. This is symbolic of his eventual conversion to Australian mores as he '(pegs his) tents / further and further south of Hadrian's Wall'. This exemplifies that his feeble connection to pre-war Europe gradually dissipates and becomes buried beneath his willingness and acculturation to Australia customs, civilisation and education.

At the heart of Skrzynecki's anthology, the poet scrutinises the mental, spiritual and cultural reminiscences of his adolescence through his migration ordeal, understanding of his ancestral past and societal mores. The poet peruses the capacity of these remembrances to sculpt and govern and individual as they progress from a condition of childlike innocence to enlightened maturity.