

## **Editorial**

This special issue of *Literary Cultures* focuses on the theme of belonging. Inspired by Elizabeth-Jane Burnett's *The Grassling*, a geological memoir that combines memoir writing with poetry, this issue draws upon literary texts to present unique and varied interpretations of what it means to belong. *The Grassling* details Burnett's experiences of growing up in the Devon countryside, and her connection to the land as an adult. The text explores the idea of belonging through her roots in England, Kenya, and the ground itself, demonstrating that belonging can be found in a multitude of places, and leading us to consider what it means to each of us.

The idea of belonging is almost unlimited in its scope; to one person, it may be finding a sense of community with others who share the same racial or cultural identity, while to another, it may simply be finding people with common interests. Alternatively, some people may not identify with the culture they were born into, and find belonging elsewhere. Others may long to reconnect to their cultural roots, despite living in a place with little or no connection to their culture. The aim of this issue is to explore and celebrate these differences, whether through racial and cultural identity, sexuality or gender identity, or something else entirely.

### **Articles**

The first part of our journal article focuses on articles, abstracts and posters created by our student writers and editors. Something that makes these pieces so interesting is how versatile the work is. Research and content has been found from authors all with different stories and opinions.

Much like *The Grassling*, the relationship between man and nature is the central theme of Berni Sorgia-Millwood's *Under Solomon Skies* (2020). Hatta Sasono explores this in her article 'At Home in Open Water,' discussing belonging in relation to the environment, and how the changing modern world can threaten to strip away people's sense of belonging and community. Home can become unfamiliar, and people are sometimes forced to reinvent their concept of belonging. Our idea of what it means to be a part of something can evolve and change over the course of our lives, or in response to specific events or people.

The question of what it means to belong is explored in great detail in Alan Moore's graphic novel *Watchmen* (1986). Jake Fillery discusses this in his article 'Personal Identity: Belonging Without Acceptance,' posing the question of whether one's personal feelings of belonging can co-exist with how society views that person. Societal expectations for a person can drastically alter how they see themselves, and can lead to isolation when expectations are not or cannot be met.

While belonging is usually viewed as something we should strive for, there are times in which trying to fit into a group can be harmful to ourselves or others. Tabitha Gresty's article 'Ambition, Fantasy and Belonging Within The Secret History' discusses the dangers of striving too hard to be a part of something that isn't right for you, analysing the ideal of belonging within Donna Tartt's *The Secret History* (1992). Belonging is seen here as an impossible concept, even potentially damaging. The article displays a dangerous side to the idea of wanting to be a part of a group or society, and the lengths people may go to if pressured.

### **Reviews**

The second part of this special issue of *Literary Cultures* explores a wide range of reviews from articles, essays, books, and poetry that relate back to our main theme. This journal article representation is a perfect opportunity to open the reader's eyes to what kind of world they actually live in and whom they share it with.

'The tragedy of Human Rights: Liberalism and The Loss of Belonging' cleverly discusses the length to which one needs to go to, in order to reach a civil society. Linking to our concept of 'Longing to Belong', Lauren Morey touches on where the root of our theme stems from today. That although *belonging* normally focuses on the individual's rights and beliefs; it can also correlate to communal belonging. From a political point of view, authors Seligman and Montgomery use America as an example of questioning whether community and inclusivity are really a necessity. Looking at the divisive foreign policy and Trump's rhetoric outlook, it brings a big realisation. The politics of our world suggests that to an extent, inclusion has to be accepted in order for an understanding of others' reality to be feasible. This brings up the questions of our own politics, that although America run off a specifically divisive structure; the UK also uses diplomacy to capitalise people's desire to belong. A structure with no middle ground, a system of first-past-the-post, left and right only, majority organization.

Callum Beaver takes a contrasting approach to linking to our theme of 'Longing to Belong'. Rather than looking at the physical attributes that we have as people, and picking them apart for what is accepted and what's not. This review looks at the psychological struggles that come with the act of not belonging. Our society runs as the root for blame, for why judgement and opinions is something that comes as a side to everything. However, *The Chimp Paradox* (2012) helps uncover the consequences that creates the worst problems. This review suggests that it is our mental health that is the real rationale behind our feelings of being ostracized or excluded. That it is our mind that is the villain in our story, with the desire to belong. Author Steve Peters does a good job of explaining the 'chimp brain' within us, and how it works against you from time to time. Looking at how the psych can turn a situation into something it isn't, is an intelligent perception of how we humans can feel misplaced. Mental health can be a taboo subject and this review helps open people's eyes and notice the emotional affects division can create.

Concentrating on theory and psychology, Radka Jurasova explores behaviour and personality traits. The writing 'Personality Types & Injuries' By F. David Pierce discusses psychological experiments based off philosophical research. It surrounds the idea that one's personality is tied to their behaviour, therefore effecting their decision-making. This cleverly links to our theme in regards to what the experimental research entailed. Focussing on safety management, organisations tried to base their employees 'accident at work' rate from their behaviour. This correlation put employees in categories of the 16 known personalities and social/psychological profiling commenced. This research links, very uniquely to our '*Longing to Belong*' as it brings up the systems of categorising. These systems are found in everyday life to make society run in an orderly fashion. However, it begs the question of whether this social style is effecting people's emotional placement in the world.

Callum Clarke delves into the more personal accounts relating to 'Longing to Belong'. A review of *My Name is Romero* (2020), an anthology full of memoir like poetry that dives into the experience of a Mexican man living in the U.S today. Alike our prompt *The Grassling*, these accounts give personal, real experiences that delve into what a person really thinks when relating back to belonging. The reviewer discusses the idea of 'culture' and the sense of knowing who you are, from having a place to call home. Somewhere in which you *belong*. A main theme pointed out by the writer of the review, is how reminiscing about how life used to be for this Mexican writer (David A. Romero), brings it back to a reality.

Moreover, although these cultural things may be relatable for some, it can bring on thoughts of isolation to those who don't understand. It creates a perception that; positives can be made from anything. Nevertheless, negatives work the same. It discusses the fact that it is all down to mind-set. We all have different stories that we want to mean something.

### **Social Media**

Finally, a large part of this Journal Article has been through the social media. Now more than ever, different social platforms give people the opportunity to communicate with whomever they wish to. With these three different platforms, we were not only able to spread information regarding the birth and process of our journal article, but it also promoted our conference that took place on Wednesday 9th December 2020.

Beginning on the 28<sup>th</sup> October 2020, our amazing social media and marketing team have managed to create platforms on:

Instagram (@longingtobelongntu),

Facebook (@ Longing To Belong NTU)

Twitter (NTU\_LTB).

With amazing and approachable set ups, our marketing and social media team have given our public audience every drop of information about our journey.

The idea of belonging can be found over such a wide spectrum of topics, and as a collective, we hope to spread these stories and analysis of culture and nature and how it can affect the psych as well as people's places in the world.