

# Leaving Home

Peter Skrzynecki

# Stanza 1

Title is ironic – family really left home in 1951. This further communicates how Skrzynecki has adapted to Australian culture and society – extending the separation from his Polish heritage that exists in *Feliks Skrzynecki*.

## Leaving Home

My first country appointment

Was the last thing we expected –

Having been through so much, it can be understood why the family thought they might finally have time to be together. The system, however, again reduces the authority of Peter to make decisions for himself.

Three of us, caught unaware

By ignorance and faith:

Our dull-witted, frog-mouthed obedience

To the letter of the law.

As immigrants, the family has learnt to blindly follow the rules, thinking it would keep them out of trouble. Their blind faith in the system led to Peter having to move.

# Stanza 2

Finding his way through the maze; a journey of obstacles – a metaphor for the journey of the entire poem.

Counting door handles, ringing telephones  
And office boys with denture smiles,

I waited three hours

For a two-minute interview;

Watching myself outside in the rain,

My severed head under one arm,

Body upright – best white shirt and tie –

A black suit to outdo

The Pallbearer of the Year!

A red-and-white sign at my feet:

“Cabbages for Sale.”

The fiddler from Chagall’s village

Was inviting me to dance.

A journey in itself as he find his way to the interview.

Waiting. Still. As in prior poems, Peter is always waiting for the next step of his journey.

Growing up; he used to watch adults, and now he is one himself.

A sarcastic tone is used to show his displeasure. The metaphor also communicates that this journey makes him feel like he is dying and attending his own funeral.

A metaphorical execution – giving up his identity to the institution, he is a mere professionally dressed man who could be mistaken as a Pallbearer.

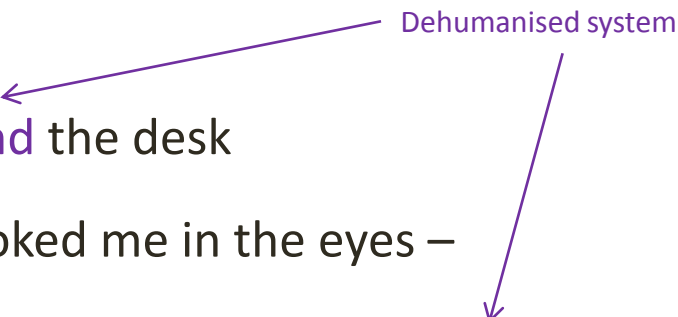
“red-and-white” imagery resembles the colours of the Polish flag; reduces his Polish and culture and heritage to mere “Cabbages for Sale”. Also communicates the way that feels like he is selling himself as he attends the interview.

Chagall was a surrealist artist (possibly influenced the style of this poem). He used a violinist in many works to bring people together; here, he tries to cheer up Peter. It’s his own mind and thinking, so he is trying to cheer himself up – he is alone on this journey.

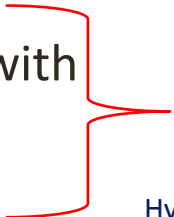
Parts of the poems are dreams; Peter foreseeing possible outcomes. This surrealist style shows a more sophisticated adult version of Peter than in previous poems.

# Stanza 3

The man behind the desk  
Never once looked me in the eyes –  
His face the back of my application papers.




Hawk-nosed, crew-cut, with  
A Tally-Ho paper skin,



Links to *Feliks Skrzynecki* "A crew-cut, grey-haired / Department clerk". Communicates Peter's perspective of the people working in the system – like army soldiers with similar haircuts.

He was the millionth person



Hyperbole – the large number of people who are ignorant of his culture. Although he has "Forgot my first Polish word", he still is not seen as Australian.

That couldn't pronounce my name.

No more, no less,

The verdict came the next day by phone



The phone – the machine – has the authority. Another journey commenced by the machine – much like "The signal at the platform's end" and "the train's whistle" in *Immigrants at Central Station, 1951*.

'You must go.'

# Stanza 4

Always cramped in some form of transport – boat, train, car...the method of journeying is uncomfortable.

We **packed** the car

Simile links to *Immigrant at Central Station, 1951* and the experience in war-torn Europe. This journey Peter is on reminds him of the very reason his family immigrated – he must be questioning the point...

Like a war-time train – clothes,

Books, records, the poems

I'd started writing;

Enjambment – run on line – the structure of this stanza resembles the interruption to his life that this move has caused; he had no time to prepare.

Said goodbye **so quickly**

I forgot for a moment where I was going.

# Stanza 5

Three hundred miles

Long journey

Up the New England Highway, I stopped;

Unloaded my bags for the night;

Swore that Head Office

Would not see my face again

Defiance – a dummy spit to himself; he is growing in confidence, at least in his mind

Unless I became my own Scipio Africanus...

A great ancient Roman warrior who defeated Hannibal. In this metaphor Skrzynecki compares this ancient fight to his dealings with the Department of Education

*Dreamt of three headless crows*

*Flying in a room*

Symbolic of a decaying institution

*Whose walls were silently burning.*

*Bald, toothless faces*

*Stood at a window, laughing in the rain,*

*Clapping to a fiddle's music –*

The rain creates an atmosphere where happiness is washed away – the dancing fiddle referenced earlier is now dancing with the nameless bosses – they have ruined all chance of happiness – the journey is not one with a happy ending.

*Their naked, hairless bodies*

Their appearance is different just like their attitude and way of treating others

*The colour of sour milk.*

Sensory imagery – leaves a sour taste – dehumanising the institution.