

WHERE IS HOME? WHAT IS HOME?

Recently I spent eight days in Italy; we stayed in a place that we had visited many times before, we knew where everything was in the hotel, in the streets and the village. We slept in the same room, with the same smells and feeling of familiarity as we opened the door to reveal the furniture placed as it was when we last left. The ease with which we placed our clothes and personal possessions in the very same places they always belonged made us forget that many others had occupied this space for the months since we last stayed. The room was well known to us; I could find with ease all I needed at any time of the day or the night without thinking.

Did this intimacy of a space that held me now within its walls make itself now my home?

Was home a place wherever my physical body found itself?

Or had I left home behind?

Every day I questioned whether this familiarity made this place a 'Home from Home'.

I allowed my subconscious to uncover my memories of this space. I allowed myself to fall deeper within its walls; as the days went by I attempted to discern whether I would feel it's comforting familiarity hold me closer.

Each day I documented my thoughts and ruminations on a postcard and sent these back to England sharing my musings with another.

I found myself in particular recalling the bad times we had experienced in this space; the year we had swine flu and my husband and I hardly left the room for ten days, narrowly escaping a stay in an Italian hospital; preferring the comfort of this room instead. Other times we had eaten in the wrong place and suffered the next day; heads swimming with sickness, lying in the bed till nightfall.

I also considered if ownership of the space meant that I belonged here and did 'belonging' mean that it was home. As I didn't pay for the room, my husband 'rented' the room out of his salary then he owned the space ...not me. I was there due to the kindness and 'say so' of another, this space was not mine. I concluded I didn't belong.

This was also true of my 'home' back in England; how could it be mine or how could I feel that I belonged as I didn't contribute financially for that space either? My husband provided the roof over my head as he bought the building from his earnings in a career he had built up and could be proud of; his home was the culmination and remuneration for his career. I had not contributed with any monetary offerings at all. Did I not belong there either? Was I just allowed to take cover under its walls? Was it a place I could also be proud of?

If not, then where is my HOME? Do I actually have a HOME?



In Gaston Bachelard's book; *The Poetics Of Space*, Bachelard reflects on the meaning of the house:

'Our house is our corner of the world...the house is one of the greatest powers of integration for the thoughts, memories and dreams of mankind. The binding principle in this integration is the daydream. Past, present and future give the house different dynamisms, which interfere, at times opposing, at others, stimulating one another' (p.6).

'Without it, man would be a dispersed being. It maintains him through the storms of the heavens and through those of his life. It is body and soul. It is human being's first world...and always in our daydreams, the house is a large cradle...Life begins well, it begins enclosed, protected, all warm in the bosom of the house' (p.7).

I can relate to Bachelard's description of the warmth and bosom of the house; if we also imagine this to refer to the physical place we exist in before birth; our mother's womb; then our house as the next place we inhabit is the most intimate of cradles. As a child our dreams may be those of nurture or nightmare; we will still find a corner within our house or home that is our place, to feel comforted and construct our own daydreams.

By considering this then we can see how it is possible over time and familiarity to build a home. In fact the act of 'building' a home is through a passage of time whereby daydreams and memories are created and bind us to a space.

Belonging then is not one of ownership as I had imagined, but of owning the memories and dreams that the space holds for us as individuals, with or without others.

Can we then have more than one home? If we imagine we can have more than one space to call 'home' then these homes hold different memories and therefore there can be different manifestations of the concept of home.

The hotel room I was in has many memories and by building these memories into this space, this space has become a home of some significance to me. This, I think, is why I choose to revisit this space repeatedly to find the succour and comfort it holds for me.

Returning to the space in England that I inhabit most of the year I feel the warmth of familiar memories from a life that has not always been good or kind to me; but where I found ways to exist and create my own daydreams. I had sought and found my own space here for comfort, contentment and freedom from pain.

The home in England is my most significant home: One where I will continue to build memories and daydreams. I will also continue to return to the comfort of another place that holds memories for me...My Italian space...My Italian home.

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Bachelard, G. (1994). *The Poetics Of Space*. Boston, Massachusetts: Beacon press.

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