

ENGLISH: *EMILY DICKINSON*

Emily Dickinson and The Catcher in the Rye

An individual's sense of belonging is shaped through their interactions with others and the world around them. The multifaceted nature of belonging – which includes personal, social, and biological senses of belonging – means that the experience of belonging can be simultaneously enriching and limiting. Dickinson's poems 'I had been hungry all the years', 'This is my letter to the world', and 'What mystery pervades a well', explore the symbiotic relationship between an enriching and limiting experience. Similarly 'The Catcher in the Rye', by JD Salinger, enriches our sense of belonging through the protagonist's rebellion against society's limitations.

Dickinson's interactions with the society of her time limited her sense of belonging on any more than a superficial level. Rather, her interactions with Nature become fundamental to the enrichment of her experience of belonging. In the poem 'I had been hungry all the years', the first stanza creates a sense of at last being accepted into society, 'My noon had come to dine'. This acceptance is then contrasted by a sense of exclusion in the second stanza, as the persona recognises the limitations of social 'plenty'. This is emphasised in the line 'I could not hope for mine', this sense of exclusion causes the person to reflect upon their sense of belonging with Nature, 'Twas so unlike the crumb/ The birds and I had often shared', and to realise that she feels more at ease in 'Natures dining room'. Through this experience of her social limitations, the persona's sense of belonging with nature is enriched. This is shown in the last stanza, 'Nor was I hungry so I found/ that hunger was a way/ of persons outside windows/ the entering takes away'. This extends the notion of a symbiotic relationship existing between what is simultaneously an enriching and limiting experience of belonging.

Again in 'This is my letter to the world', Dickinson provides a sense of connection in the first line, but then withdraws that proximity and replaces it with disconnection in the line 'That never wrote to me'. By creating this distinction between herself and the world, Dickinson draws our attention to her limited experiences of belonging to the culture of her time. She had little direct contact with those around her; her main correspondence was through letters that she wrote. Few of her works were published; both because the syntax and grammar were too unconventional, and because she was a woman writing in a male domain. This emphasises the link between limited interactions with other providing a limited sense of belonging.

This duality is also shown in the novel 'The Catcher in the Rye'. The protagonist, Holden Caulfield, feels extremely disconnected from society. He has few functional relationships, despite the fact he continually tries to connect with people. His desire for connection is explored throughout the novel with his interactions with others. He attempts to start conversations with the cab driver, with Sunny and with Carl Luce; he often calls Jane Gallagher, only to hang up before she answers. This desire to connect is limited by Holden's previous familiarity with not belonging and his fear of rejection. Holden's experience of exclusion; both imposed and chosen, evoke empathy from the readers, as they feel a sense of connection with him. Salinger creates this relationship between Holden and the readers through Holden's highly individual 'voice', the use of first person places the readers in Holden's position; they share the insecurity expressed through his constant digressions, swearing, limited vocabulary and child-like rants. This allows them to feel a sense of connection and understanding with Holden, as well as comparing his situation with their own. This heightens their awareness of where they themselves belong, enriching their sense of belonging to the real world.

Unlike Holden, Dickinson's limiting experiences with people allow her further her experience of belonging through her own perceptions. In 'What mystery pervades a well!' she explores the intricate nature of belonging with the natural world. In the first stanza, she introduces the mystery that pervades the poem, where the well is a 'neighbour from another world'. The word 'neighbour' creates proximity and a sense of homeliness, whilst 'from another world' paradoxically evokes a sense of distance, and unfamiliarity. The personification of Nature is used to emphasise Dickinson's

understanding of the complexities of the natural world – shown in the penultimate stanza: 'But nature is a stranger yet', acknowledging again, the ideas created in the first stanza. Dickinson then summaries her symbiotic relationship with nature through the paradox '...those who know her know her less/ the nearer her they get', which also suggests that the richer her sense of belonging with nature becomes, the more she feels limited by the vast mystery of it. Thus confirming the notion that an enriching and limiting experience of belonging can, and must, co-exist.

The multifaceted nature of belonging allows an individual to be both enriched and limited in many ways and by varying experiences and interactions. What allows one individual to feel enriched may at the same time limit another. It is this symbiotic relationship between the two types of experiences that allow an individual to shape their sense of belonging.