

ENGLISH: *THE CRUCIBLE*

"An individual's identity is created through the conflicts that arise from belonging."

Discuss the statement with reference to your study of belonging, your prescribed text and TWO other related texts of your own choosing.

Belonging is an ambiguous and multi-faceted concept that encompasses both individuals and societies and how they interact. The conflicts that arise between the two can nourish or hinder the experience of belonging and shape one's identity. The concept of belonging is conveyed in Arthur Miller's drama of 1953 *The Crucible: A Play in Four Acts* which explores the key thematic concern of conformity along with communal belonging through Miller's manipulation of the theatrical medium. These ideas are furthered in Joseph Mankiewicz's film of 1950 *All About Eve* and Les Murray's poem form 1969 *An Absolutely Ordinary Rainbow*. Each composer encapsulates the identity's of individuals as they experience a sense of belonging or not belonging in society.

Miller, Mankiewicz and Murray all examine the notion of conformity within each respective text exploring the complexity of belonging and how it sculpts identity. Miller's play highlights the transitory nature of belonging with Elizabeth Proctor "a covenanted Christian woman" is excluded by Abigail Williams, a teenage adulteress, establishing the hypocrisy within the society of Salem. Miller's characterisation of John and Elizabeth Proctor poses them as segregated from Salem;

Do as you will, do as you will!

The use of repetition and exclamations mark indicates the strength of Elizabeth's resolve as well as the emotional intensity of the final scenes of the play as they come to a climax in the third and fourth acts. John and Elizabeth buck the societal framework of theocracy which stifles their individuality and consequently their lack of conformity results in a sense of alienation. By Proctor signing the false confession they could both belong and live again, however they resist society's pressures and are painted as heroic individuals by Miller. Ironically, the events reinforce the loyalty of their marriage and yet segregates them from Salem. Miller creates "exalted drama" through the structure of the play and the conflict between an individual and a group which hinder the Proctors' experience of belonging. This notion is reiterated in the theocratic court of Salem where Danforth says

A person is either with this court or he must be counted against it, there be no road between.

Miller's use of metaphor demonstrates Danforth's purposeful exclusion of Proctor from the theocratic court of Salem, exploiting his good honest nature to convict him of evil. Danforth is a staunch figure symbolising the social and legal system, creating an effective "us versus them" conflict relating to Miller's social and historical context. Miller equates the McCarthy-led communist hunts of the 1950s to the Salem witch trials of 1692 suggesting both as "un-American" and simply absurd as a response to the paranoiac climate of his time. Thus, Proctor's identity and reputation is molded by his exclusion from Salem and its court leading to his experience of not belonging.

Moreover, these ideas are furthered in Mankiewicz's film featuring an ambitious female protagonist, Eve Harrington, who yearns to conform within the "theatre society". In the opening scenes her ambitious nature is clearly revealed in the dialogue;

She has had one wish, one prayer, one dream to belong to us.

Mankiewicz's use of foreshadowing and the cinematic technique of a flashback portrays Eve's intense desire to conform within the "theatre society" as well as the use of parallel syntax to elucidate Eve's ambitions. The exclusivity of the "theatre society" is also conveyed through the

narrator's use of second person narration. This technique is also used to alienate Karen Richards in the quotation, "theatre by marriage". The narrator's tone and exclusive language implies this is a stain that overshadows Karen and consequently she distances herself through the use of second person in "you theatre people", reinforcing her sense of isolation due to the lack of conformity. The notion of marriage being the key to Karen's power fits into Mankiewicz's 1950s context where patriarchal connections was the means by which women could gain power in society, establishing the issue of feminism which is furthered within the film. The human experience of belonging is complex and both conformity and isolation can shape an individual's identity.

Similarly, Murray's poem elucidates the issue of conformity and how a lack of understanding can result in a sense of not belonging to be experienced. Murray's "weeping man" persona is an alienated figure who weeps in Sydney's Martin Place. The very notion of "weeping" is ironic as it is a bitter-sweet experience, appearing painful and yet a way in which the man can explore inner peace. This is reinforced in the juxtaposition of his "writhen face" to his "ordinary body". His weeping isolates him from the "hurrying crowds" and creates a sense of alienation to be experienced as he fails to conform to society's pressures. Murray paints his persona as an individual which shapes his identity. The poet also uses religious allusion to exemplify the man's experience of frustration and misunderstanding.

Some will say, a halo or force stood around him.

A physical wall is referred to by Murray segregating the "weeping man" from society. Murray dismisses the event being miraculous suggesting the man is misunderstood by society. An unapproachable aura surrounds the man whilst in the cosmopolitan centre of Sydney. The conflicting desire to belong and to be an individual shapes an individual's identity.

The concept of communal belonging is also the lynchpin in all three texts, offering experiences of belonging and isolation to be experienced by individuals, hence informing their self-identity. Miller utilises archaic dialogue within the play to alienate his audience from Salem, however still recognisable to relate and appeal to his contemporary audience. Miller's *The Crucible* explores the dynamics of communal belonging within Abigail's group of girls. Their unity is clearly evident in;

I saw Martha Bellows with the Devil
I saw Goody Sibber with the Devil

Miller's use of parallel syntax reinforces their unity as a group by the end of Act One, and continues to do so throughout the play, and how much power it wields within Puritan society of Salem which feared disunity. Abigail and the girls harness this to divert the blame and punishment away from their wrongdoing and cultivate hysteria within the isolated outpost of Salem. The Salem court is posed as hypocritical by Miller as Danforth takes Abigail's word, a mere child, over a martyr's like Rebecca Nurse. This contradiction reinforces the inevitability of the disintegration of Salem as a society. The girls' identity and experiences are shaped by their inclusion and sense of belonging within the court. Communal belonging is also portrayed through the use of theatrical devices by Miller with detailed stage directions, "sunlight poured through two high windows" suggesting that the court exposes the truth however Danforth's abuse of his institutional power consequently leads to the collapse of the society of Salem. The lives of the inhabitants of Salem are shifted as a results of the witch trials and their experiences of belonging and not belonging within a community.

Mankiewicz also encapsulates the idea of communal belonging in his film through the battle between theatre and Hollywood (film).

Why do you have to go out... there [Hollywood]

The effective use of pause in Eve's dialogue promotes a sense of distance and distaste between theatre and Hollywood. This motif recurs throughout the film particularly through Margo's cynical

sarcasm. The "us versus them" is framed by the film's context as theatre's popularity began to decline in the 1950s with the advent of the television. A sense of unity within the "theatre society" forge the individuals' values and hence their identity. Furthermore, communal belonging is portrayed in the dialogue between Eve and Addison de Witt:

Belong to you? it's medieval.
You belong to me.

The dialogue elucidates the idea of a man possessing a woman as a commodity rather than as a human. This notion is not so "medieval" as during the 1950s men were still considered powerful especially with feminism in its infancy. The figure of Eve represents the ambitions of the typical 1950s women and also her exploitation of men to gain power, intrinsically feminist idea. Eve's experience of belonging as a woman to society forces her to be used by Addison, her identity is not untainted with her manipulation to conform with the theatre as Margo thwarts any aspect of individuality.

The notion of communal belonging is also represented in Murray's poem *An Absolutely Ordinary Rainbow* with the persona's identity being shaped by the crowd's reactions. Murray's use of first person narration in his free-verse monologue poem includes the reader adding an aspect of depth and realism to the poem.

their minds longing for tears like children for a rainbow

The simile exemplifies the notion of the crowd being united by their shared experience, comprised of individuals—and yet—acting as a whole. The "weeping man" touches individuals with the cleansing and regenerative quality of his tears, however still feels alienated from society which is united through his experience, an intriguing contrast. The "weeping man" persona is clearly an individual who resists urban culture and his "weeping" shapes not only his own identity as being different but also the crowd's identity as they experience a paradigm of beliefs as they misunderstand the man. Murray's portrayal of his persona reflect the aspect of communal belonging which contributes to the sense of belonging which one may experience, these inner conflicts of the human condition forges one's identity.

Overall, the concept of belonging is complex and ambiguous and the conflicts to achieve a sense of belonging or experience of exclusion shapes an individual's identity. These ideas are examined in Miller's play *The Crucible: A Play in Four Acts* (1953) through the author's use of theatrical devices and context to portray the thematic concerns of conformity and belonging. These concepts are resonated in Mankiewicz's film *All About Eve* (1950) and Les Murray's poem *An Absolutely Ordinary Rainbow* (1969) as each composer harnesses their respective medium to portray the concept of belonging effectively to its audience. The conflicts that arise from belonging indeed shape and individual's identity particularly through the interaction with society and communities. Perhaps, everyone belongs to the worldwide community because we all simply do not belong.