

ENGLISH-AREA OF STUDY

Belonging doesn't just mean a sense of place: its being at home with yourself and knowing who you are.

Belonging is not just a sense of place, it is derived from acceptance and contentment with oneself and the relationships developed with others. It is this way that to belong is to be at home with oneself and possess an understanding of who you are. The texts *Great Expectations* By Charles Dickens, *Neighbours* By Tim Winton and the poem 'Alone' By Edgar Allen Poe show that through acceptance of oneself and their relations with others that one can develop a sense of belonging to a group or form an independent notion of belonging not based on connecting with others.

Material wealth nor social status are vessels to personal contentment and as such are not elements of belonging. Personal integrity and firm relationships with those that one is most identifiable with is what belonging is inherited from. In *Great Expectations*, The persona Pip tries to become a gentleman of society and in doing so he forgoes all personal integrity and previous relationships to fit into a class that will never truly accept him due to his lack of social status and parentage, explicit factors needed to belong to such a society as the upper class. The unattainable Estella is an ironic symbol of the class that Pip can never belong to as she judges him as "coarse and common" a trait that most of the superficial upper-class deem Pip to be not more than. She however is descendant from criminal heritage highlighting how even the upper-class are not without fundamental flaws. Nevertheless Pip endeavors to assimilate himself into the upper class and forgoes all of his personal integrity to take on the explicit and superficial values of the upper class as he feels "unsatisfied with himself". The concept of belonging independently outside of class as one is able to accept themselves to be different is a concept explored extensively in the poem 'Alone'. There persona is so out of touch with society that he is determined not to conform to its expectations which would entitle him to be untrue to himself. He accepts the inadequate feeling of not being able to belong to society "The mystery that binds me still –" and embraces it to transcend the traditional idea of needing connections with others to belong as Pip eventually feels about Joe and to find personal contentment. He's inability to make connections with others have allowed him to be true to himself, "All I lov'd, I lov'd alone".

He is an enigma to other but not himself as through personal acceptance he is able to find an independent sense of belonging beyond the oppressive frameworks of society. This highlights how personal contentment and knowing who you are is what is truly fundamental to belonging. Upon the death of Magwitch, Pip realizes the true value of having connections to others. He sees how Magwitch's personal integrity and truly genteel nature juxtaposes his own "I only saw a man, who had felt affectionately, gratefully and generously towards me with great constancy" Pip is lead to rediscover the value of morality and relationships with those whom he is closest to and how his own sense of belonging is connected to them. He affirms that "It is a most miserable thing to feel ashamed of home". Pip finally accepts who he truly is and that in endeavoring to become a gentleman he was in fact been becoming the converse as those who possess truly genteel attributes are those that he is truly content with accept him for who he is. "As I had grown accustomed to my expectations I had insensibly begun to notice their effect upon myself and those around me.

Their influence on my own character, I disguised from my recognition as much as possible, but I knew very well it was not all good." Pip's lack of Social status and parentage is fundamentally what forbade him from being accepted into the strict frameworks of the upper class. However an exception to the strict frameworks lies in Estella's case. She is adopted by Ms. Havisham and forced to conform to them. She is shaped by her cold hearted benefactor into an instrument to seek vengeance upon men. She is told that love consists of "blind devotion, self-humiliation and utter submission". She is given no chance to develop her own notion of belonging or an identity. She is trapped in a life of which she feels she must conform as in the poem alone as the persona feels that

he is so different to those with which he exists with. Personification of nature used as a metaphor reflects on how both the persona and Estella feel “From the lightning in the sky, As time slowly passes by” Both are forced to a life in which they do not feel joy to be a part of and as others make decisions that spark radical changes they simply sit as time passes them by.

Through Estella’s connections to Ms Havisham she is forced into a violent and oppressive marriage. Upon the death of Ms. Havisham and the dissolution of her marriage is Estella finally able to seek to know who she truly is, however with her benefactor gone she is just a girl of criminal heritage displaced from her true place of belonging as dictated by her heritage. The Text Neighbours also explores the connections a couple develops with others as they are displaced from all they were once familiar to. They are placed into a community where they feel like “sojourners in a foreign land”. They are isolated by a lack of understanding as highlighted by their unfamiliar neighbours “the Macedonian family shouting on one side of the fence and the strange Polish man on the other.” However through the kind generosity they are given an opportunity to belong. Through the sharing of food and with it understanding they develop firm relationships with their neighbours. Their discovery of belonging and acceptance is so vital to the young couple that in the end it is not the birth of their baby but the understanding of the personal integrity of their kind hearted neighbours that is the true climax. “On the Macedonian side of the fence a small queue of bleary faces looked up cheering, the young man began to weep.” Estella is able to find her personal sense of contentment by exploring her connections to those that have surrounded her. Never was she given the opportunity to belong or to develop her own identity and it is for this reason that she is content to belong away from society. This is evident when she turns down Pips offer of an intimate relationship even though he has always been there with her “we will continue friends apart”.

Acceptance and the connections with others or acceptance of yourself is the true vessel to belonging and knowing who you are. Once can overcome the feelings of isolation and alienation by developing relationships with others and embracing their differences. By forcing yourself to fit into a place is not a way to truly find a notion of belonging yet by being at home with oneself and your connections with others are we truly able to belong and feel like valuable members of either a society or embrace our differences to develop an independent notion of contentment.