

ENGLISH

Belonging

Belonging, a psychological desire for human survival as shaped by an individual's experiences and relationships has throughout history been a powerful and self probing concept. Its intangible nature has sent 6 million Jews to concentration camps, 2 jumbo planes for the World Trade Centre and made Keats, Steinbeck, Eliot and Dickinson some of the most prominent modern literary household names. Belonging occurs when an individual creates an affinity with others through the sharing of commonalities, and such coincidence is created by one's personal acquaintances and affiliations with the wider community. Evidently an individual's experiences and relationships derived from existing contexts are pivotal in deciding one's ability to attain a sense of belonging. This introspective interpretation of belonging is subsequently reflected in the poems "No. 83 I gave myself to him" and "No. 181 The saddest noise, the sweetest noise" by Emily Dickinson and Andrew Denton's interview with Waleed Aly.

The absence of affinity is highlighted conspicuously in the futility of the marriage in the poem "I gave myself to him". The relationship between the persona and her lover is apathetically commercialized in the form of a contract. The repetitive presence of financial jargons can be seen as a motif throughout the poem to sustain the belief that the persona has entered a loveless and unpredictable marriage. The lack of emotive language in the poem further amplifies this impression in emitting a cynical and transactional view of marriage and relationships alike. Dickinson's attempt to mock the idealized perspective on marriage and relationship can be seen in the verses "*But till the merchant buys, / Still fable in the Isles of Spice*". The purchase of the good itself can be seen as a metaphor for relationships where an exchange of give and receive is take place. The pending of the merchant to trade act as Dickinson's own reluctance to conform and subsequently this does not allow her to form many relationships, and thus allows her to develop a cynical approach towards marriage.

Similarly Dickinson's reclusive past carries a strong overtone in the poem "The saddest noise, the sweetest noise". Dickinson's brief and exclusive encounters with belonging has been repetitively interrupted throughout the course of her life, first in childhood through the loss of Sophia Holland, then adolescence through the losses of Newton and Humphrey to sudden illnesses and eventually the devastation of the American civil war in her adulthood. These experiences have helped to redefine Dickinson's tolerance and understanding of the vulnerability of mortals at the hands of nature to a degree few can empathize with. The lack of personal experience with such dilemmas through Dickinson's poem further denotes the disfranchised and dislocated position responders are placed through her poetry. This impression is exemplified by the confession in the closing 2 lines of the poem "*We wish the ear had not a heart. / So dangerously near.*" It serves to reflect that susceptibility and fallibility of the human anatomy to change and prejudice when threatened by the diversity and power of nature. The monosyllabic structure of the second last line allows for each word to be delivered with its own emphatic conviction which consequently syndicates its intentioned physical brute.

Andrew Denton's interview with Waleed Aly presents belonging as a multi facet concept and explores the ramifications of finding cohesion and contentment in between of these identities. His multiple identities as a Muslim, Australian, Egyptian and a Richmond Tiger Mascot reflect the entanglements of relationships and experiences in the contemporary multicultural society. "The clash of ignorance" between Muslims and non-Muslims is highlighted in the interview as a factor which marginalizes both parties in search of total submission to acceptance. As Aly insists that "*...it's this tragic situation where you've got Muslims legitimately complaining about being stereotyped all the while stereotyping back with just as much persistence.*" The downward spiral of conflicting worldviews poses a barrier for belonging as people possesses different perspective according to different context.

Analogously, the interview of Waleed Aly and the two poems “I gave myself to him” and “the saddest noise, the sweetest noise” all possesses the element of deliberate pause. This serves to create a due sense of hesitation and isolation. This is seen in the interview where amid cumulative listing, Aly pauses in between his recount of his first impression of Egypt. He recalls “...I remember thinking I just want to go home I just found the place rundown...and dirty... and crowded...and inhospitable... and so on.” The pauses in between his descriptions dramatize the state of irrationality and extent of cultural alienation he has experienced. Comparatively Dickinson employs a similar approach in her applications of punctuations. Dashes and semicolon are repetitively used in the poems to suggest the persona’s state of uncertainty. This is seen in No 83 “At least, ‘tis mutual risk -- / some found it mutual gain;” and again in No 128 “An ear can break a human heart / as quickly as a spear;” The placements of such punctuations allows responders to be halted in their reading and be directed to a subtle pause, which allows for hesitation to be displayed. The reluctance of the persona in these circumstances further highlights Dickinson’s alienation and misplacement of identity as show by Aly. This amplifies the complicated nature of belonging

Admittedly Dickinson and Aly has both demonstrated that belong is a life long quest for acceptance and shaped by one’s own experiences and relationships. Dickinson, dated almost two centuries prior to Aly has posed belonging as a concept as a result of the commonalities between individuals, however her own traumatized life and course of American history has distorted the definition of belonging. Aly portrays the contemporary Australian dilemma where cultural, religious and social identity all seeks to claim its own realm within an individual. The quest to seek belonging and bond with others is essentially shaped by one’s experiences and relationships, its importance is manifest, and its effect global, but no hopefully this doesn’t take another 2 jumbo jets to prove.