

Theme of connection in american literature

Experience, Human Nature



Connection is the restorative force by which individuals reaffirm or transform their identities. Ultimately, it is the ability to form meaningful and sustaining relationships that allows individuals to assess and affirm their values.

Raimond Gaita's memoir, "Romulus, My Father" (RMF), Evan Hunter's short story "On the Sidewalk Bleeding" (OTSB), and "The Oasis", a Shark Island Documentary, explore this notion through employing the universal themes of compassion, alienation and love as they enrich characters sense of hope, significance, comfort and security- fundamental to a sense of belonging, or paradoxically lead to a sense of isolation and exclusion.

RMF explores the catalytic nature of relationships in constructing an imperative sense of significance, comfort and security, through examining the themes of love, compassion and alienation. This is reflected through the contrast between Romulus' "life, his values, his friendship with Hora and marriage to Milka", and his relationship with his first wife, Christine. Romulus and Christine's relationship is based on an "unrealistic hope", and a tremulous love, recognised and expressed by Raimond in his narration as "naive".

This is supported by his description of Christine as "a troubled city girl... [who] couldn't settle in a.. landscape that highlighted her isolation", the contrast of which emphasises her destructive inability to form satisfying relationships, alienating her from Romulus, Raimond and the sense of security and comfort implicated by the notion of a united family. This is emphasised as Christine "stood separately, weeping bitterly" at Mitru's

funeral, with use of emotive language to craft an image of isolation, conveying the impacts of alienation and loss on her temperament.

By contrast, Raimond, Romulus and Hora come to share an ingrained sense of idealistic congruency, “ I learnt from them the connection between individuality and...Otherness”. Here, “ Otherness” – an allusion to 20th Century European philosophy- is paired with the connotations of “ individuality” to highlight the fact that Romulus and Hora’s relationship is based upon an analogous self-conception, which acts to reaffirm Romulus’s values and beliefs.

Most importantly these shared ideals, spawning from their “ unqualified sense of common humanity”, help shape young Raimond’s perception of acceptance, as well as their aphoristic belief that “ only...rigorous truthfulness could give...strength of character” – the universality of which transcends all three men’s subjective experiences to confirm their identities as part of a significant, secure relationship. Romulus also extends this to his relationship with Milka, which is centred upon a common appreciation of honesty and compassion.

This is shown through his description of her as, “ not too tall...short...fat...thin”, whose accumulative juxtaposition of negations stresses his attraction to her both in appearance and “ impersonality” – a notion which is developed by Milka’s frank admission, “ She told him she couldn’t cook...he replied it didn’t matter”. Here, along with the qualification, “ his respect...was unusual in husbands of his vintage”, Milka’s assertion in “ couldn’t cook” emphasises

the contextual differences their relationship has from both Romulus' previous marriage to Christine and mainstream society through the altruistic strength of its values.

Ultimately accentuating the deep satisfaction and sense of comfort that they share, this is affirmed by Romulus' assertion, " Nothing could compromise the intrinsic good of...having found each other". Similarly OTSB explores the value of relationships in restructuring and corroborating ideals and self perceptions, by providing console and a sanctuary for hope and growth of character.

The protagonist's affectionate relationship with his girlfriend Laura, who shares a bond with Andy centred on love and compassion, acts as the equilibrium between Andy's gang related life and his true self. The relationship provides Andy with the inner-unity required for strength or character, allowing him to challenge his mediocre life with dreamsthat give him purpose, and a hope that " Someday he would marry her, and they would have a lot of kids, and then they would get out of the neighbourhood".

The connotations of ' marriage', paired with the symbolic reference of children highlights Andy's devotion to the notion of family and the sense of security and worth it provides. The strength of their attachment and the significance their compassionate relationship engenders, fashions a sense of emancipation for Andy, sanctioning the removal of his gang jacket " which had only one meaning.. a very simple meaning...the meaning of nothing". The accumulative repetition and personification of the jacket ubstantiates it

as a tangible image, symbolic of Andy's internal conflict, and his ability to exonerate himself of it is metaphorical for the value Andy places on their relationship, further emphasising its significance in restructuring Andy's identity and providing the sense of worth, console and hope, fundamental to a sense of belonging. Likewise 'The Oasis' examines the significance of relationships in shaping our identity through the assessment and confirmation of values.

These relationships are often structured on reliance and support which allow an individual to achieve security, significance and his/her true potential. The audience is first introduced to the protagonist Paul, a Salvation Army worker, through an establishing shot of him walking down a main road against the flow of traffic. A visual metaphor for his desperate struggle to reinstate and sense of purpose and moral integrity in the disadvantaged youth, reinforced by the vectors of his downcast gaze.

The metaphor "Paul is their lifeline" juxtaposed with the dramatic image of Paul holding children's hands on the edge of a cliff, reinforces the significance of youth connection to the Salvation Army's centre and exemplifies the danger of "children slipping through societies safety nets". Paul's intention to revolutionise the self conceptions of homeless youth becomes symbolic of the metaphorical safety nets of society. This is evident as he attempts to connect youth with Religion, to give them a sense of metaphysical importance, emphasised through a montage of baptisms highlighting the amalgamation of the Bibles morals with youth identity.

Therefore.... Hence, “ RMF”, “ OTSW” and “ The Oasis” each support the notion of connection as a restorative force by which individuals assess and affirm their values, and thus reform their identities. By employing common universal themes such as love, hope, alienation and compassion, each text effectively demonstrates the necessity of security, comfort and significance in achieving a sense of belonging, and how these may be attained through relationships.