

# Belonging: the crucible

[Literature](#), [Books](#)



Belonging is a far-reaching yet complex idea that is powerfully explored in Arthur Miller's *The Crucible*. It illustrates a variety of aspects of belonging, where it can be compared and contrasted with ideas in other texts such as Oliver Parker's film *Dorian Gray* and Oodgeroo Noonuccal's poem *We Are Going*. These texts present ideas of power and isolation, which consequently lead to individuals either belonging or not belonging to the community. Through the use of a variety of literary, film and dramatic techniques, the composers can emphasise and convey the similar (or differing) aspects of belonging found in each text.

Power is an evident theme in *The Crucible* that suggests it controls the fragile town of Salem. As such, an individual's feeling of belonging is influenced by Salem's theocratic and authoritative government. The characterisation of Hale allows the audience to realise this, as he immediately belongs and assumes a position of power. Initially, Hale is the driving force of the witch trials, as he represents the theocracy, is educated and possesses books that are "weighted with authority". This feeds his ego as the 'expert' and demonstrates his ability to exert power onto the townspeople.

He also stresses that "Theology is a fortress; no crack in a fortress may be accounted small". This clearly shows that you either belong or don't belong in the community, and that those who choose not to belong do so at their own peril. However, Hale's guilt grows throughout the play when he realises the bitterness of the accusations and metaphorically describes his actions with "What I touched with my bright confidence it died, and where I turned

the eye of my great faith, blood flowed up”. This evidently shows the extent to which Hale can exert power and his consequent feelings of guilt.

Ultimately, Hale questions his faith and removes himself from the sense of belonging fostered in Salem. His assertion of “ I denounce these proceedings, I quit this court! ” emphasise his withdrawal from the community and decision not to conform. The same idea of power can be compared to Oliver Parker’s film *Dorian Gray*, and suggests that there can be devastating consequences when one allows themselves to be influenced by others in order to belong. Since Dorian possesses wealth, beauty and eternal youth, he is a powerful but vain character.

Being a newcomer, Dorian wants to belong and so therefore, he allows himself to be influenced by Henry Wotton’s hedonistic way of life. When Dorian announces “ Perhaps I should nail my soul to the devil’s alter”, he contemplates the idea of conforming in order to sustain power and belong. Dorian does eventually follow Henry’s example and becomes accepted by society. Parker also uses the technique of slow motion to emphasise this. When Dorian enters and announces “ Well here I am”, time temporarily slows in order to accentuate his power and influence.

Dorian’s friends, who are now old and bitter, are awestruck by the sight of him. As such, his sense of belonging is heightened due to the admiration and acceptance he receives from society. However, Dorian eventually develops a conscience and recognises he has led a sinful life. Parker uses the motif of a deteriorating painting to demonstrate this. The painting reminds Dorian that he should maintain his own values and firstly belonging to himself before

belonging to society. As a result, he realises the negative consequences of trying to conform and loses his power by destroying the painting as a sign of self-belonging.

Isolation is another idea explored in *The Crucible*, suggesting that individuals can face barriers to belonging, which therefore lead to feelings of alienation. Abigail and her circle of friends are the ones who feel the most loneliness since they are young and unmarried. This forces them to secretly rebel and dance in the woods. For Abigail, the need for acceptance is shown through her affair with John Proctor. Miller juxtaposes love and lust to highlight their differences. Abigail's exclamation of " You loved me John Proctor, and whatever sin it is, you love me! " shows her repetition of the word ' love'.

However, Proctor only uses ' lust' to describe their relationship. As a result, the audience sees that Abigail is a character who is constantly rejected with a desperate need to belong. Furthermore, Abigail's crying of " Child! How do you call me child! " emphasise her failed attempt at belonging, and suggests that the only way for a woman to be accepted in society is to be a wife. John Proctor is the opposite of Abigail and ultimately chooses not to belong. His words " I cannot mount the gibbet like a saint. It is a fraud. I am not that man" are metaphorical and signify his rejection of the Salem justice system.

Although he believes he is unworthy of anything due to his affair with Abigail, Proctor eventually finds " a shred of goodness" in himself by maintaining his own values and choosing to belong to himself. His redemption is also shown through Miller's stage directions. The drumroll crash and streaming sunlight in the final scene contrasts with previous scenes and signifies that he has

done the right thing by choosing to die and belong to himself rather than sign himself to lies. In comparison to *The Crucible*, Oodgeroo Noonuccal's poem *We Are Going* also conveys themes of isolation.

Similarly to Abigail, the Aboriginal persona faces a barrier to belonging. The alienation of which the persona feels is due to the white settlers and the consequential loss of culture and identity. "Many white men hurry about like ants" is an example of a simile that suggests that the settlers are busy and stressed. This is a contrast to traditional Aboriginal life, and shows the differing perspectives between the settlers and the narrator. Here, the juxtaposition of the two ethnic groups is parallel to Abigail and Proctor's view on love and lust, and reinforces the idea of isolation.

Furthermore, Noonuccal uses repetition, particularly with the word "Gone" to emphasize the lost feelings of belonging. Noonuccal writes: "The scrubs are gone, the eagle is gone, the bora ring is gone" to stress the loss of culture and connection with the land. The poem also uses collective first-person narration to give the audience a personal understanding on the frustrations of not belonging. "We are going" are the three words in the title and conclusion. It implies that the Aboriginals are not welcome in their homeland and will let go of the past and their old ways.

This echoes the idea of belonging to one's self, which is found in *The Crucible*. Like Proctor, the Aboriginals choose not to conform and decide to leave in order to preserve their individuality and "self belonging". *The Crucible* exhibits situations where humans have the need for power and acceptance. These ideas of belonging (or not belonging) can also be

compared in Dorian Gray and We Are Going through a variety of dramatic, film and literary techniques. Therefore, these ideas are delicately communicated with a greater impact on the audience's understanding of the concept of belonging.