

Into the wild as you like it

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Texts may show us that a sense of belonging can emerge from connections made with people, places and the larger world. To what extent do the texts you have studied support this idea? 'Happiness is only real if shared'. This insightful quote from Sean Penn's 2007 film *Into the Wild* shows that any sense of belonging must arise through connection we make with others and the wider world. Shakespeare's play *As You Like It* also demonstrates this, and shows that belonging is a natural instinct and one fundamental to a meaningful life.

The setting of *As You Like It* plays a crucial role in shaping the idea of belonging in the play. Like the typical pastoral, the beginning of the play is set in court, a place established as a hub of corruption and political tension. Orlando's house is described as a 'butchery' as his brother plots to kill him, '[Rosalind] is banish'd', and Duke Senior calls courtly life 'painted pomp'. The combination of images suggests estrangement and not belonging. By contrast, Arden is a free, untainted setting where characters are able to develop relationships without conforming to rigid social constraints.

Also, the transition from the high density of formal verse in the opening scenes to the more frequent use of prose, signifying acceptance and familiarity, towards the end reinforces this transition from tension and not belonging to unity. This harmonious ending is epitomized in the final scene in which 'these eight...take hands'. That the characters do form relationships there in which they belong is a clear indication that belonging is an innate part of the human condition. In essence, through the natural setting of the play, Shakespeare emphasises that belonging is a natural state of humanity.

Similarly, *Into the Wild* contains pastoral elements that contribute to belonging in the film. Like the 'painted pomp' of the court in *As You Like It*, Penn portrays society as 'oppressive', employing dark metaphors of warfare to reinforce this; fence-posts are 'black sword-tips' and red tiles 'hardened blood'. The dinner scene is muted, with the use of shaky hand-held camera emphasizing the tension and estrangement. By contrast, the wilderness acts as a catalyst for belonging in which he realizes the significance of connections with people to happiness. All scenes of him in the wild are shot in rich natural light, as opposed to the exaggerated fluorescent lighting used in the civilized scenes. This contrast in lighting suggests that both Arden and the wild are places of healing where characters learn about the nature of belonging and the importance of connections. *As You Like It* shows that belonging can arise through connections with others. There are many ways to be accepted and Shakespeare reflects this in his use of diverse characters.

Rosalind takes a more sensible, realistic approach than Orlando, stating that 'men have died from time to time...but not for love'. Orlando is much more the Petrarchan lover, vowing to 'live and die' her slave. Celia and Oliver's relationship is a more spontaneous connection, 'whoever loved that loved not at first sight?' whereas Touchstone and Audrey simply see marriage as a natural part of life 'as the ox has his bow, so wedlock does come nibbling'. The contrast between these couples combined with the comedic ending shows that belonging can arise through variety of relationships and connections.

The Rainbow Fish similarly demonstrates that belonging can arise from a variety of relationships. The fish depicted in the book are of different shapes and sizes, and are even joined intermittently by other creatures; a starfish, an octopus, a shark, suggesting implying a diversity of connections that can lead to belonging. Also, the Rainbow fish's scales are a combination of all the colours of the other monochromatic fish. Through this Pfiser is implying that we have something in common with everyone, and so connections with others are not limited to a certain type.

The correlation between connections with people and belonging is perhaps seen most clearly in As You like It through the contrast between Rosalind and Jacques, the brooding melancholic. Shakespeare juxtaposes the two characters to make the point that belonging arises primarily from connections. Where Rosalind has many friends such as her ' dear coz' Celia, Orlando and Touchstone, Jacques is alone and friendless, reveling in his melancholy which he ' loves better than laughing'.

He chooses not to belong, symbolized in his refusal to partake in the final dance, despite being beseeched by the Duke to ' stay, Jacques, stay! ' Where Jacques rejects connections in favor of ' matter to be heard and learned', Rosalind embraces them, and as a result is the happier, more fulfilled character. Shakespeare's use of contrast clearly shows that belonging, and hence happiness, is an intrapersonal phenomenon. In many ways, Chris of Into The Wild mirrors Jacques.

He refuses to belong, striving after Platonic ideals similarly to how Jacques seeks learning. He explicitly says that ' rather than love...give me truth',

paralleling Jacques preference for knowledge over belonging. Unlike Jacques however, he regrets his decisions towards the end, seen through the director's use of the diary to convey his thoughts. In an extreme close up, he writes 'lonely' slowly and deliberately, and underlines it to highlight the intensity of his feeling of isolation. The music is sad and haunting, emphasizing his regret over his alienation.

Further to this, the final scene consists of a series of rapid flashbacks depicting characters with which he formed relationships. The voiceover is in second person 'what if I were smiling and running you're your arms?', with the use of the conditional tense highlighting his regret at his rejection of connections. This use of voice over combined with positive cumulative images ending in a still shot of Chris, suggests that our sense of belonging is important to both happiness and a sense of self. Like Chris, the Rainbow Fish ultimately realizes the value of belonging.

Initially he was a character like Jacques; when offered by the others to 'come join in' he would glide past, 'proud and silent'. However, in the end he chooses to share his 'shimmering scales', a recurring motif symbolizing love and friendship. This transition from isolation to belonging is further emphasised by the positioning of the fish in the book. On the first page, he is depicted alone in the centre, with his back to the other fish. As he learns to belong, he begins to turn towards others, eventually ending face to face as he gives away the first scale.

His change of attitude is also reflected in the shift in colour scheme, from cooler hues of blue to warmer purples. This suggests happiness and love,

again implying that a sense of belonging is vital to happiness. Both *As You Like It* and *Into the Wild* show that belonging may, and does, arise out of the connections we make with other people. These connections are a natural part of the human condition and can take many shapes and forms, but they are essential to happiness as it is a shared phenomenon.