

"Explore how our views of belonging and not belonging can be shaped by significant experiences"

An individual's perception of belonging or not belonging to their surrounding environment, interpersonal relationships and the human condition can be heavily shaped by one's significant experiences. Shakespeare's *As You Like It* (AYLI) and *"Heathers"* (1988) directed by Michael Lehmann, both explore how a person's circumstances and situations can affect their ability to belong within a community.

In AYLI, Shakespeare explores the affiliation to place to develop one's sense of belonging or not belonging through the juxtaposition of two places. The audience is first introduced to the court, an unnatural place full of corruption and artificiality in which most characters seek to escape due to Duke Frederick's tyrannical rule, which limits their sense of belonging. When Celia and Rosalind successfully do so, we are introduced to the main setting of the play, the Forest of Arden. Silvius, Phebe, Corin, William and Audrey all belong to the forest already as it is their home and accommodates their lifestyle. For most of the other characters in the play, the Forest is a refuge, free from the hypocrisy, deceit and ambition of the court. Duke Senior declares the opposition between the two worlds in his first speech, "Are not these woods / More free from peril than that of the envious court?" The Forest of Arden is a place of harmony, free from the significant experiences involving the anger of brothers and fathers, the false friendship of flattering courtiers, and free from envy and malice which therefore allows all characters to belong at peace.

Contrastingly, there is no equivalent to the Forest of Arden in Lehmann's *"Heathers"*. The central character Veronica has no stable physical environment in which she feels she belongs and therefore seeks closure within a diary. However, Veronica is not alone in her feelings of isolation. Through the use of predominantly jargon language, it is announced by multiple characters in the film that they do not feel as though they belong in their school environment, based on the negativity of their significant experiences as highlighted by a student stating "I just want my high school to be a nicer place". When attempting to blow up the school JD says, "People will look at the ashes of Westburg and say, "Now there's a school that self-destructed, not because society didn't care, but because the school was society." This highlights that the school is not the only location in which isolation is felt, but rather, the feelings are representative of the whole society. JD furthers this notion when he states that he has been to "Seven schools in seven states and the only thing different is my locker combination." Not only does this show his lack of connection to a single place due to his movement throughout America, it also highlights that significant experiences at any school are only important due to the narrow confines and values within the small demographic of a high school environment.

People can also satisfy their need to belong through their experiences in personal relationships and human interaction. This concept is strongly reflected in AYLI as Shakespeare deliberately represents all characters as suffering some form of exclusion from belonging, or having to make a choice not to belong, most often due to familial conflict. Both Duke Senior

and Orlando are excluded from their families by their own brothers. When Rosalind is banished from the court by her uncle, her cousin Celia chooses to leave the court purely out of her love for Rosalind, as shown by the line, "Now we go in content / To liberty not to banishment." Touchstone also follows them into the forest out of his loyalty to Celia. Rosalind hopes to find her father Duke

Senior in the forest so she can re-establish her family unit of belonging. However once in the Forest, Rosalind avoids all openings for belonging by adopting a male appearance and becoming Gandymede. Shakespeare uses dramatic irony here as all the characters onstage except Celia are unaware of Gandymede's true identity. The main effect of this is to delay the development of Rosalind's relationship with Orlando and to add humour as the disguised Rosalind manipulates the characters onstage. When Shakespeare ends the play with four weddings, he highlights the significance of marriage as a ritual of interpersonal belonging, exploring the ongoing theme of love, thus indicating the never ending condition of belonging to one another.

In "Heathers", Lehmann has constructed the central characters to not only defy teenage cliché, but completely challenge all expectations of the stereotypical views of belonging and not belonging within high school society. Veronica states her feelings of isolation within her group when she says, "I don't really like my friends ... It's just like their people I work with and our job is being popular". However, rather than standing up for herself, leaving the "most powerful clique in the school" and finding her own identity, Veronica teams up with JD to unwittingly murders the clique's leader, Heather Chandler and makes it look like a suicide. She sarcastically comments afterwards, "Dear Diary, my teen-angst bullshit now has a body count." Detached emotional statements such as this abound in "Heathers" with further murders committed, and staged as suicide, as Lehmann creates a strong sense that some of the most significant experiences to effect one's life, such as a suicide, have no impression on the characters in the film. The lack of emotional connection within interpersonal relationships is furthered in the familial interaction between Veronica and her parents and JD and his father. Lehmann creates caricature-like conversations, such as JD referring to his father as "Son" and his father referring to him as "Pa". Furthermore, when Veronica pretends to commit suicide and her mother finds her hanging in her bedroom, she doesn't cry or yell but rather her first reaction is "I should've let you take that job at the mall." The importance of personal relationships and human interaction, though not made as obvious, is equally emphasized in "Heathers" as it is in AYLI. Lehmann chose to emphasize the significance of relationships by creating a world in which all characters are in some way dysfunctional, due to their inability to belong to one another. The absence of the connections within relationships highlights the importance of them.

An individual's feelings of belonging or not belonging to the human condition can be shaped by their significant experiences in the world. The human condition is expressed in all literature. It is the nature and quality of the human existence - what it is like to be human. Shakespeare uses Jaques famous speech in Act 2 Scene 7 to highlight his view of the human condition as a performance: "All the world's a stage and all the men and women merely players". He continues his speech to examine the period of a man's life, concluding with old age. He presents the rationalistic theory of man as a machine, as a mere particular. He exists, but whatever he does has no eternal meaning. Jaques offers a very pessimistic view and believes that all life ends in a physical death, repudiating the possibility of an afterlife. Whilst Jaques speech is hugely important as an individual's view on belonging or not belonging to the human condition, through the four weddings at the end of the play, Shakespeare redeems that, although life has its negatives, it is overall an extremely significant experience to be enjoyed and embraced.

Lehmann also portrays a pessimistic view on the human condition. With the exception of the last scene involving Veronica and Martha, there is no human condition in "Heathers". There is no connection in the relationships as they are represented as beyond superficial, but rather only basic interaction and instruction. Each character walks, talks and acts in an extremely pre-ordained role. Their inability to remove themselves from these roles means that they cannot connect with other people because they are all too focused on their self. This is especially highlighted through Veronica's parents inability to change their behaviour depending on the situations around them. For example, they repeat the same superficial conversation when asking Veronica about her prom partner as they do when conversing about Heather Chandler's recent suicide. Like Jacques, Lehmann presents the rationalistic view of man as a machine, as a product of the universe, placed on Earth to fulfill a minute, if any, purpose in the significant experiences of life. It is the absence of a functional representation of the human condition in "Heathers" that highlights the importance of it in real life to allow us to belong or not belong.

The significance of an individual's life experiences is made obvious in both Shakespeare's AYLI and Lehmann's "Heathers". Through the use of significant events such as death, marriage, and personal evolution, these texts show the importance of our surrounding environment, personal relationships and the human condition and allow an audience to see how one's sense of belonging or not belonging can be shaped by their interactions just as much as the choices they make.

FEEDBACK FOR ESSAY – BELONGING 2 BY [REDACTED]

MARK: 7/15

GENERAL COMMENTS:

Hi [REDACTED]

You really need more examples and techniques from your texts - in particular As you like it. Whilst your second and third paragraphs deal with it better, your first only really has the one textual reference.

There is a lot of content here but not enough detail – I would suggest halving your discussion and going in to greater depth of analysis.

Analyse Jacques' speech in your third paragraph as this is where you are really able to answer the question - you quote segments but don't follow them up with analysis. Also, perhaps move this towards the top of your essay as you want to answer the question early on.

Your analysis of 'Heathers' is actually quite good, but we really want to see more of your prescribed text - seeing as you should have spent a term studying it. Try to make a statement about belonging, show how this is evident in your prescribed and simply support it with your additional. You have done a 50/50 (maybe even a 60/40) split and I would be cautious of this.

Your first paragraphs need a clearer topic sentence/thesis - you have done this well in P2 and 3.

The three foundations of belonging are the easiest way to approach this - connections with PLACES, PEOPLE and SELF - if you explore this balance in your texts you will do fine.

You have written well, and the analysis you have done (particularly with your additional) is good - you just need more from your prescribed.

I really like your third paragraph on As you like it - good points and good commentary, just try and support it with greater analysis.

Take a look through your AYLI notes and try to find a handful of additional quotes or dramatic techniques that you could include in your response.

Also, and this is important – your essay is much longer than the average student is going to be able to produce in the exam. The average essay in the exam is going to be 700 words – your essay is almost double that. Don't jeopardise the other sections of the exam by running over in section 3.

Your adherence to the question is adequate, although you could show closer links by making closer reference to significant experiences.

Finally, work on your introduction. It needs to show that you are the expert in what you are talking about. Try to bring in how the study impacts the audience (you) to establish a personal voice.