

10) Anti-belonging

Safety lay in solitude.

Belonging required a subjugation of the self, a submerging in the group. Not easy for any egotist, let alone for one who has felt betrayed from his earliest days by his primary group, the family.

Where love and loyalty are dependant on approval neither take root. I soon learnt not to expect loyalty, accepted therefore that I did not owe loyalty in return. Betrayed at every turn, even my brother telling mealtime tales on me – in a laughing voice so not actually telling tales. Disloyalty didn't end there. Even if the tale had been of a falling out with a friend the friend's side would be taken, usually by my mother: “You must have said/done something.”

Primed thus for betrayal I became an unforgiving friend.

Safety lay in solitude.

According to Rilke those solitary days of my boyhood wandering the wooded shores of the Dart estuary were my training to be a poet. Boys and poets apparently need fertile solitude, an uninterrupted space in which to think, to mull – John Clare on his fens, Wordsworth on his fells. Little comes from group activity, which could be why I continue to be so often happy to escape company, to again be walking out alone.

Safety lies in solitude.

If my dreams are anything to go by I would seem to have spent my life dealing with irascible and illogical individuals, friendly one minute, antagonistic and accusatory the next. Producing in me a core attitude which stands somewhat in the way of a readiness to belong, to subsume myself in any grouping, even a partnership. 'We' doesn't speak for me.

My upbringing had me confused for a good many years, until I learnt that there is a definite difference between training and manipulation. Training – table manners, personal hygiene – teaches one to cope with what life may throw at you. Manipulation is to get you to do what at that moment the manipulator wants you to do, and it can often be only at that moment. Now, knowing how manipulators work, the vocabulary and emotional terms employed, I am quietly, stubbornly *en garde* the moment a signifier is recognised.

Has mine become a failure to trust?

I certainly never had much trust in my country. In my growing up I saw how its governments had treated its soldiers once no longer needed. The ex-soldiers I lived among, and as a teenager worked alongside, all had the bigger battle getting a decent war pension out of the M.o.D.

That lack of trust extends to even the smallest grouping. Which is why I'm careful to edge away from anyone who thinks to speak for me. Any use of the inclusive 'we' will see me heading for the door.

I did occasionally enjoy hob-nobbing with the ridiculously wealthy, their lack of concern for appearances, their not giving a hoot for convention, in their doing whatever their money and status gave them licence to do. My not having that wealth though saw me as a fraud in their company.

Safety as always lies in solitude.

Most people, met or unmet, often just going by their dress or their walk, have struck me as ridiculous. I subsequently distance myself from any declaration of 'ourselves,' of our communal, our generational selves. All essentially phoney, media-inspired/labelled. No, I was not there, didn't act/dress like that, was not on the other side, any side... Fuck off, leave me alone.

Safety lies in solitude.