

## **Belonging and sense of place**

Archie Maddox

Whoever feels like they really belong? I mean, honestly, who the hell are these people, self-adjusted enough to just be comfortable with who they are and what their personality is? I get jealous of that shit. Most days, I get halfway through before I've convinced myself, 'you know what, today my personality just isn't working'. I kind of hate people who are wholly comfortable in their skin suits – because when I think about it, I've never been, and probably never will be, absolutely comfortable with who I am.

Since I can remember, my default feeling has been *uncomfortable*. There was so much I never understood about the world and I feel that a lot of that may stem from my racial make-up. I'm mixed race, and I think that offers a unique way to grow up, in that both your parents look fundamentally different not only to each other, but also to yourself. That puts you in a strange place because from the moment you begin to understand yourself beyond an eating and shitting machine of unreasonableness – you realise that you're the odd one out.

So much of my exploration of the world and ideas comes from the lack of comfort in my own skin (which should be comfortable – I'm so moisturised

I sheen like a seal and slip off the furniture). The will to understand, the wanting to explore characters who don't lack what I do, has gone some way to appeasing my never-ending unease with existence. What is existence anyway – what is reality?

The world we live in literally makes no sense. I mean, we live in a world where people cut down trees to make birdhouses out of wood. Nothing ever adds up; reality and existence are an eternal puzzle that we attempt to, but never will, solve. And I *love* that. I love that we will always search for answers, always search for our place and where we fit in. Personally, I've always had questions about why the world is the way it is - there was so much that I wanted to know and if the truth didn't satiate my appetite adequately, then my own personal version of the truth would do. In fact, that would probably be better. Hence writing. A construction of a truth that, to me, makes more sense than the cosmic insanity we all willingly accept as normal.

A sense of belonging has always been a motivation for me. For me, and I think a lot of writers, the lack of comfort is what helps to drive things forward. In essence, to be a creative is to be a little broken, to question the status quo because of your status as an outsider while also demanding that the world understand your personal expressions of existence. There's an intellectual itch that always needs scratching, and our construction of our own, numerous worlds within our bodies of work allows us greater clarity on the outer world that we live in.

Sometimes I really wish that I felt like I belonged. But I think about it: who really wants to belong? To belong is to be invisible, and to be seen is currency in this modern world. To belong is to be stifled, whereas not having a sense of place to be tied down to makes you unencumbered, freed up to explore, since your roots aren't so deeply embedded. Exploration can mean discovery – and how do you make discoveries when you're comfortable with where you are?

I live in a perpetual sense of being lost. And being lost gives you the freedom to wander.

### **Archie Maddox**

Archie is an emerging screenwriter and playwright. His work has been produced at the Bush Theatre, Lyric Hammersmith, Orange Tree Theatre, Royal Court, and in New York at the New Light Theatre.

Archie's play *A Place for We* was shortlisted for the Bruntwood Prize from a submission pile of 1900 and was also shortlisted for the Alfred Fagon Award. It was staged at the Park Theatre in autumn 2021 and has just been nominated for an Olivier Award 2022.

In 2017 Archie was a part of the BBC Writers Room 'London Voices' and in 2018 he was selected as part of the prestigious 4Screenwriting course. He was also named as the writer in Residence at BBC Radio Drama London Production.

As well as a writer Archie is also a stand-up comedian and was runner up in Amused Moose Laugh Off 2014, Winner of the Bath Festival New Comedian 2014, and NATYs 2014 finalist. His debut show, *Shirts Vs Skins*

got several 4-star reviews at the Edinburgh Fringe 2016 and was long listed for the Amused Moose Comedy Award.

A recording of this talk can be found at **[writersmosaic.org.uk](http://writersmosaic.org.uk)**

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