

## ENGLISH STANDARD: *THE STORY OF TOM BRENNAN*

**The experience of moving into the world both limits and extends individuals' freedom. Discuss.**

---

When transitioning into a new world, individuals encounter obstacles that challenge their attitudes and limit their freedom, yet influences from outside factors in new experiences enable them to understand new insights and develop maturity, hence conversely, extend individuals' freedom. The novel "Story of Tom Brennan" by J.C. Bourke and an animated movie "Spirited Away" by Miyazaki, both explore how barriers in the characters' moving into new phases restrict their beliefs and freedom due to their fear from unfamiliar worlds. Nonetheless, the texts also show how the characters are changing and how their challenges are solved as a result of developed responsibilities and support from other valuable characters in the contexts of their narratives. Through the composers' careful selection of powerful features and forms, the characters' responsive emotions and actions towards the experiences are successfully depicted and hence show the idea that "moving into the world both limits and extends individuals' freedom."

Fear is an ultimate feeling that individuals receive when changing into an unknown world as the challenges brought by obstacles in their new experiences limit their freedom. In the structure of "Story of Tom Brennan", not only the loss of his brother that makes Tom spontaneously limits his freedom but also the move from Mumbili to Coghill, as it requires coping with a new society. Thus Tom is very depressed and defensive at the start which is shown when he constantly uses short replies creating impassioned and loathing tone – "yeah?" and "hey?" His distressed emotion is also depicted through a metaphoric motif of "black tunnel" on his guilt and representation of the flashbacks of the "sudden death." By utilizing these techniques Bourke reveals that Tom obscures his true feelings as a way for coping with the changes. Apart from Tom, Tess has been affected greatly by the loss, too. This is evident when Tom uses a metaphor to describe her current appearance which reflects her mental state in trying to escape the new challenges: "I saw things, not her." The metaphor is then extended through an imagery created by descriptive words, "stunk" and "toenails curled up." These techniques vividly paint unpleasant images in the readers' minds which allow us to see how Tess' careless and irresponsible attitudes and how she isolates herself from the outside world also limits Tom's ability to grow and transition into the world of maturity.

Similarly, the idea of fear from transitioning into a new world is also portrayed through the structure of "Spirited Away" when Chihiro is forced to work for survival in an unknown place controlled by a witch - "Spirit World". At the start, Chihiro's initially spoiled behavior is shown through her frustrated and stubborn tone in the dialogue with her parents – "why do we have to move?" She intentionally uses rhetorical question, hence reveals her intolerance of reality. However, while Chihiro is in the Spirit World, unlike Tom and Tess, instead of escaping from difficulties she endures to overcome obstacles. This is depicted when a close-up captures the witch taking part of her name away from a contract, which symbolizes a change of identity, and also when a larger scale of the witch occupies most space of the rule of thirds showing an invasion of Chihiro's personal space. Yet her way of coping with changes also limits her freedom as she no longer can be her real self in the central process of the narrative.

Conversely, through the challenges in new experiences, outside factors eventually enlighten individuals' perspectives which enhance their responsibility and lead to maturity, hence extend their freedom. Even though Tom is guarded at the beginning of the text, after he realizes that he is not blamed by the new community he not only has changed to his true self – talkative and active, but has also become more mature. This is depicted through his realization that he finds his "old self" when he is with Chrissy as "it is being away from the pain..., no debt, no guilt. Just Tom." The repetition of "no" and negative descriptive words extends the metaphor of "black tunnel" by contributing to the cohesive motif of burden throughout the text. Yet with the long contrasting to short sentence structure, the motif also highlights Tom's change of view, hence allowing the readers

to infer that Tom has become more thoughtful and has found his lost freedom. Likewise, after Tess sees her children's developed independence, she starts to return to her former self and becomes a more responsible mother. Her change is expressed in Tom's dialogue when he says "there was mum –, ..., her eyes could smile." Bourke's use of dash strongly engages the audience to reflect how Tom describes her at the beginning and contrast the two images of Tess, thus further emphasizing the necessary process for dealing with change. Moreover, Bourke also uses personification about Tess' eyes to paint the image vividly in the readers' minds order to allow us to perceive how cheerful she now is and that her improved response provides another extending experience for Tom's maturity.

Developed responsibility and maturity that led to more freedom is also explored in "Spirited Away" as Chihiro has become a mentor for others through learning how to deal with hardships in the Spirit World. Miyazaki highlights this by juxtaposing a scene when a long-shot captures Chihiro's intimidated and childish body gesture – clinging tight with an angry facial expression to her mother's arm as they walk to an unknown place, with the scene when she demands her friends to "behave" themselves in a solemn tone while guiding them to somewhere she has never been to. By incorporating this scene with dark lighting and silence, Chihiro's new developed courage and independence are emphasized, hence reinforcing the juxtaposition and deepens the audience's understanding of her change from immaturity to sensibility. The plot structure portrays her developed independence; at the end where she is set free effectively positions us to infer that her change allows her to be free again.

Individuals grow as they learn how to deal with challenges when moving into a new world. Both Miyazaki and Bourke powerfully portray this through their stylistic language as they successfully depict the characters' responsive attitudes towards new experiences in order to engage the audience to learn the positive values from the texts. Although the fear from obstacles in coping with new places limit one's capability, by learning from mistakes and through their personal search for methods in breaking the barriers against freedom, individual becomes stronger and mature which spontaneously extend their freedom.