

ENGLISH STANDARD: *THE STORY OF TOM BRENNAN*

**“The experience of moving into the world can challenge individuals’ attitudes and beliefs,”
Discuss.**

When transitioning into new worlds, individuals encounter obstacles that challenge their attitudes and beliefs and impact them emotionally, yet through the hardships individuals understand new insights and develop maturity, which conversely, enhance their attitudes and beliefs. 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 experiences flood their emotions with depression and horror due to their fear of unfamiliar worlds. The texts also show how the characters are changing and how their challenges are solved as a result of developed independence through learning from challenges. Through the composers’ careful selection of powerful features and forms, the characters’ responsive emotions and actions towards the experiences are successfully depicted and hence showing the idea that “the experience of moving into the world challenge” and enhance “individuals’ attitudes and beliefs.

Fear is an ultimate feeling that individuals receive when changing into an unknown world as the challenges brought by obstacles in new experiences contradict to their personal values. In the structure of “Story of Tom Brennan”, not only does the loss of his brother form a barrier for Tom’s attitudes and beliefs in the world but also his move from Mumbili to Coghill. Thus he experience extreme depression, which is portrayed through a metaphorical motif in his thoughts of a “black tunnel” that represents his guilt and distress. This also links to the flashbacks of the “sudden death”, revealing that Tom is emotionally affected from the obstacles in his new world which obstructs him from following his initial beliefs and attitudes – not being his true identity. Apart from Tom, Tess is also emotionally affected which is explored when her depressed response to the huge obstacle provided by her son’s tragic error is reflected through the metaphor “I saw things, not her” in Tom’s dialogue. This is further emphasized through the emotive verbs “stunk” and “toenails curled up” acting as extended metaphor to vividly paint unpleasant images and allow us to perceive Tess’ irresponsible attitude and melancholy, as well as that her struggle also forms obstacles in Tom’s transition into the world of maturity.

Similarly, the idea of fear from venturing into a new world challenges one’s attitudes and beliefs is portrayed in “Spirited Away.” Like Tom, Chihiro has to move but is forced to work for survival in an unknown place controlled by a witch - “Spirit World”! Chihiro’s initially spoiled behavior is shown through her frustrated and stubborn tone and use of rhetorical question in the dialogue – “Why do we have to move?” However, while she is in the Spirit World her childish attitudes are forced to change as unlike Tom and Tess, the obstacle from being an outsider put her in horror instead of depression. This is depicted when a close-up captures the witch taking part of Chihiro’s name away from a contract, symbolizing an unwanted change of identity. Moreover in a spectacularly surreal mis-en-scene, a larger scale of the witch occupies most space shows an invasion of Chihiro’s personal space which reinforces her vulnerability. Although Miyazaki’s great imagination lowers the modality of the film, the persuasive plot structure enables us to understand Chihiro’s fear as she has immediately changed to an obedient child. Thus this shows that the obstacles in her new experience restrict her values which limit her identity in the central process of the narrative like Tom.

Conversely, through the challenges in new experiences, individuals learn from hardships which enlighten their perspectives and help overcome their difficulties as their maturity and beliefs are enhanced. Even though Tom is guarded at the beginning of the text, after he realizes that he is not blamed he not only has changed to his true self – active, but has also become more mature. This is evident when he finds his “old self” while he is with Chrissy as “it is being away from the pain..., no debt, no guilt.” The repetition of “no” and negative descriptive words extends the metaphor of the “black tunnel” by contributing to the cohesive motif of burden throughout the text. Through an enlightening plot structure at the end, this allows us to infer that Tom starts to think philosophically

in life and is relieved from his miseries as a result of improved attitudes and beliefs. Likewise, after Tess sees her children's improvement, she starts to return to her lost self and becomes a more responsible mother – her reward for persevering through obstacles. Her change is expressed in Tom's dialogue when he says "there was mum –, ..., her eyes could smile." The use of dash strongly engages the audience to reflect on how Tom describes her at the beginning and contrasts the two images of Tess. Bourke also utilizes personification of Tess' eyes to paint the image vividly in order to allow us to perceive how cheerful she has changed back and that her improved response provides another significant enhancement for Tom's maturity.

Developed responsibility and maturity that enhance one's lost attitudes and beliefs 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' 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 bring back her initial values.

Individuals grow as they learn how to deal with challenges in new experiences 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 identity, by learning from mistakes and through their personal search for methods in breaking the barriers, individual becomes stronger and mature which consequently overcome their challenged attitudes and beliefs.