

# Tom brennan module



“The Story of Tom Brennan” by JC Burke is a novel, by JC Burke faces the realism of the aspects of growing up, the necessity of immediate transition into new phases of life and one’s entry into the broader world through the character of Tom Brennan. The novel tackles how a mainstream family encounters comparable experiences, yet how each individual differs as each responds to the situation in various ways resulting in the person’s growth and change. The aspects in the novel continually confronted by modern day teenagers comprises of tragedy, conflict, love, belonging, along with the acceptance and forgiveness to a family that made a mistake. These aspects are enunciated through characterisation, flashbacks, colloquial language, symbolism, the power of first person and the realism of the themes challenged by the Brennan family in comparison to modern day society.

Burke’s novel is written in a first person narration from Tom Brennan’s perspective, allowing for immediacy and rawness that makes the story all the more influential by capturing emotions of Tom and how he responds to his family’s withdrawal from the town of Mumbilli. The chapter closes with the quote “My name is Tom Brennan and this is my story”, which further enhances the realistic nature of this text towards its intended audience.

During the opening prologue the audience is introduced to the once respected Brennan family during their mystery departure as a result of the irresponsible action of the eldest son Daniel.

The quote “In a couple of hours they would wake and find us gone, far away, so as not to remind them of their pain and what our family now meant to this town”, represents the hostility the town placed towards the Brennan

family hindering towards the extent by which Daniel??™s actions hurt people in the community. Introducing the narrative with a mystery, and lack of reasoning towards what??™s happened sets the pathway for the story, leaving the audience in suspense. This tragic event that sparked the transition into a new phase of life that caused Tom to grow up is built on as the plot deepens. Through the employment of flashbacks the intended audience is able engage and link the motives behind the Brennan families move from Mumbilli to Coghill. The flashbacks in the novel help to strengthen Tom??™s image and express his pain and confusion along with his struggle to find his way back to the life he once knew, that he never thought would be taken away from him.

By weaving parts of the past into the present in the form of flashbacks, Burke is able to let the audience link the story together to compare Tom??™s emotional state, exploring the ways that individuals grow when they are taken out of their comfort and venture into new experiences. Tom expresses in the form of a flashbacks to retell the tragedy, flashing back to the moment when he had first seen the accident ??“ ??? Daniel??™s blue falcon on its side against a tree, revealing Daniel running away, Luke and Nicole visibly dead, and Fin trapped in the car, drifting in and out of consciousness???. Burke describes this in simple language to describe the accident, which creates the realism that impacts heavily on the readers frame of mind, shared between the characters also forming the basis for Tom Brennan??™s transition into a new phase of life. After the events of the fatal car accident the novel depicts the chaos that tragedy can bring down upon a family and how it thrusts individuals into a new world. Conflict is a large theme that

infuses with this text as a result of the tragic circumstances of the story causing a change between each family member. During the Brennan family's first transition into Coghill, they settle into their grandmother's house, which they come to find intolerable due to the Grandma's passionate religious beliefs. However as time passes, they come to terms with the shoes their Grandma attempts to fill and although her cooking was not the greatest, she took on the role of the mother when Tess, began neglecting the rest of the family as she succumbed to deep depression. The inability of Tess to take on the mother role, impacted on the family significantly as she pushed everyone away as she deteriorated due to the tragedy with Daniel, forming conflict between the families.

However, the novel builds on the small steps she takes to make an improvement in her mental health, and to play a better motherly role towards her whole family, as illustrated in the quote "one small step for man, one giant leap for mankind. Cause today, for my family, that's what it was like," standing at the beginning of her emotional recovery. This all comes about after Kath describes "although Daniel has to watch his back in jail, Fin can't even turn his head to see back" signifying that Tess has no concept of the despair that Kath faces daily. This also shows the strong nature of Kath to not give up even though Fin is "like a baby, due to his spinal injury and unable to do anything for himself," standing in an inferior position when compared to Tess. This illustrates that Tess and Kath are constantly dominated by the problems facing their own sons, along with the conflict that Kath faces the greater burden in looking after Fin for the rest of her life, yet it is Tess who is unable to cope and breaks down. These barriers

and obstacles that are faced through personal experience enable people to learn, grow, adapt and change as an individual as they respond to the situation or tragedy. Burke further engages the audience to understand and relate to the story through prose and colloquial language, again tying to the realistic nature of the events and further allowing correlation. The colloquial nature through Burke's word choice and dialogue gives the characters a convincing world of adolescence, in order to move the audience through personal challenges and emotions of guilt and fear.

The inclusion of teenage slang, swearing and references to adolescent idioms such as "arvo", "lazy prick", and "stupid wanker" allows the author to speak directly to the target audience of adolescents, therefore shaping the audience's attitudes and ideas towards the events faced in the novel. The authenticity is added to the text through the voices of contemporary Australian adolescents by each individual enhancing the pathways each character takes in order to handle the situation that they are put in "causing for transition into a new phase of life. The entire Brennan family enters into the broader world, as the family's secret is revealed in the new town of Coghill. As Tom begins to realise that Coghill doesn't revolve around the gossip and dwell on the mistake of one family, like Mumbilli did, due to the small population of the tight-knit community. This aids to the recovery of Tom growing up, along with the forming of a new relationship between him and Chrissy Tulake.

His ability to love and be forgiven for a mistake that his entire family was blamed for allowed him to reach acceptance, both within himself, and within others as well, resulting in Tom's growth and change "That was the

morning we swam and loved each other and that was the morning Tom Brennan came back forever???. Tom gradually regains balance in his life as he becomes a member of a wider social group as he ventures back into the world that gives his life purpose and contributes to him moving towards the future allowing the past to be buried and forgotten. As the story develops the audience experiences Tom growing up physically, emotionally and even spiritually due to his Gran??™s influence. As he began accepting his past, he became more optimistic and outward looking, allowing him to understand not just himself but those around him, to those he had been antagonistic and hostile towards in the past. This is the outcome of the challenges Tom tackles including making a scrapbook for Daniel, sharing his problems, making mateship within the Coghill football team and running. At the time the symbolic nature of him running with his uncle Brennan, not only contributed to his fitness levels and his ability to return to his prowess in football, but was seen as a way of running away from his problems, taking a positive step to get back to rugby and the life he once knew.

The didactic nature of the text illustrates the reality of the tragedy and to the extent which hindered the audience??™s belief to learn and grow as each member of the Brennan family responds to the accident in various ways, both short and long term. Each characters experience of the tragedy, guilt and distress following the accident resulted in the personal growth and transition into a new phase of life. The techniques helped to describe the realism and impacts the event had on different characters and how each took on different pathways to come back to reality out of depression, guilt

and blame, overcoming the past and learning to adapt and grow into the broader world.