

Issue of transitions
into new phases of
life in stephen
daldry's "billy elliot"
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[Life](#)



Transitions into new phases of life and into new worlds can be challenging but also transformative, offering a new understanding of self and others.

A Transition is a process whereby individuals experience new phases of life as they move towards new worlds. Transitions will influence the attitudes and beliefs of individuals as they gain new understandings of themselves and others. Often transitions involve challenges which individuals must overcome. Stephen Daldry's film *Billy Elliot* explores the transformative nature of transitions through his journey in both the world of boxing and ballet. Along the protagonist's transformation, he undertakes challenges such as Sexism, Family traditions and the questioning of masculinity due to the social context of Billy's world. Similarly, Shaun Tan's picture book *The Red Tree* tells the story of a young persona as she undergoes a journey of self-discovery. Shaun Tan uses a series of styles and techniques in his illustrations to demonstrate the hardships experienced as she gains an understanding of herself and perceptions of her community.

In the film *Billy Elliot*, the main protagonist moves to a new world of ballet, despite being initially restricted by the viewpoints of his family and community. This development away from boxing to the world of ballet is first evident in the opening scene, where the soundtrack *Cosmic Dancer* foreshadows and emphasises Billy's desire for dancing through the lyrics " I danced myself right out of the womb". The beginning of his transition for individualism can be viewed through cinematography techniques and mise en scene. Later in the film, Billy places his gloves on the wooden bar, this is shown through a mid-shot which represents a metaphorical barrier between the world of boxing and ballet. The juxtaposition between billy's masculine <https://assignbuster.com/issue-of-transitions-into-new-phases-of-life-in-stephen-daldrys-billy-elliott-and-shaun-tans-the-red-tree/>

blue clothing and the young girls feminine white attire creates a contrasting effect to further broaden this barrier. Stephen Daldry includes a tracking close up in order to contrast the pure white colours of the ballerina's shoes. Furthermore, Billy stomps his foot rather than placing it gracefully, thus exhibiting masculine actions and unfamiliarity about this new world.

Similarly, Shaun Tan's *The red tree*, has the persona trying to enter a new phase of life, one which she can express her interests and be who she wants to be. Similarly, to *Billy Elliot*, the community is preventing the persona from expressing herself. Shaun Tan illustrates this as surrounding figures are seen to be wearing the same clothing, this represents a common belief of conformity in the community. The persona is seen in the center frame wearing similar clothing and possesses an illuminated jewel, the illumination of the jewel is intensified with the use of a cold color pallet shown in the background. This has a parallel relationship to the miners in *Billy Elliot* as they felt obligated to strike although they would be referred to as 'scabs'. Billy experiences a similar barrier as he dances in the bathroom away from others.

Character relationships can either hinder or promote the transition of individuals into new worlds. This is shown evident in *Billy Elliot* as Billy and Jackie have a strained relationship due to the death of Billy's mother and ongoing strike. Initially Jackie was determined to forge his ideas of tradition and masculinity into Billy. This belief can be made clear through "Lads do football... or boxing... or wrestling. Not friggin' ballet." However, despite the viewpoint of the community and family he overcomes stereotypes towards

gender roles as Billy demonstrates his talent and adherence. Furthermore, challenges are also evident through somewhat minor characters in the film. Michael is Billy's best friend and is faced with a community which hold strong preconceived judgments about sexuality, although both characters face complex issues such as gender stereotypes, Michael overcomes fears through the acceptance by Billy. Both complement each other in the movement to new worlds, Billy allows Michael to apply makeup whilst Michael allows Billy to teach ballet. This mutual relationship proves to be imperative as Billy performs in Swan Lake and Michael finds same sex love.

Shaun Tan illustrates the inner challenges of depression faced by the persona through exaggerated and imaginary illustrations. It is the inner thoughts of the persona which creates obstacles preventing any form of uplifting. The statement "Darkness overcomes you" alongside a salient illustration of a fish represents the influence depression has on someone's life. Causing feelings such as entrapment as "overcomes" signifies no control. The fish is positioned directly above the the persona creating a dark shadow, acting as a constant reminder of her depression. Surrounding personas show no acknowledgement of the giant fish and therefore can be deduced that the unnatural images are created by her imagination. Next, "The world is a deaf machine" highlights the eternal and everlasting challenge of depression. Through the use of juxtaposition between silence and noise where Shaun Tan is again enforcing the idea that this is her imagination, whilst also creating a deeper visual image.

Although Billy was constantly held back by challenges, the confrontation between Billy and his father in the gym allows Jackie to gain an understanding of the importance ballet has to Billy. Stephen Daldry establishes the initial mood of the scene with an over the shoulder shot showing the invoked power of Billy through his facial expressions. In addition, fog and low key lighting creates a sense of unclarity to Jackie whilst giving a negative aura about the situation. The soundtrack played represents Billy's triumph over adversity as it's paired with a montage of medium and long shots, ultimately intensifying the importance of the scene as Billy experiences a breakthrough in his transition.

The final scene of Billy Elliot's performance in Swan Lake can be directly compared to pages towards the end of The red tree. Where both personas reach the end of their transition, reaching their potential and becoming who they were meant to be rather than who their communities wanted them to be. In The red tree hope is characterized throughout by the repetition of a red leaf. The red leaf is small in size and often outweighed by Tan's imaginative illustrations, however the constant re-appearance shows Hope has always existed in the persona's world only she was unable to accept it. Furthermore, as the book progresses, a tonal shift in colors becomes apparent, the orange and red colored leaves reflect the connotations of hope and belief. Specifically, on the last page a red tree can be seen in center frame illuminated by lights whilst readers catch their first glimpse of happiness from the persona. Therefore, signifying the persona has found hope and happiness in their life, signaling the end of the transformation and journey. Likewise, Billy is shot on stage through close ups and mid shots, his

positioning allows him to take up a large portion of the frame, showing power and dominance. Ultimately both endings become the defining moment for personas in their transition.

In conclusion, Stephen Daldry's cinematic masterpiece *Billy Elliot* and Shaun Tan's book *The Red Tree* effectively portray worlds where challenges must be overcome in order to make the transformation into new phases of life. *Billy Elliot* highlights the challenges of individualism and self-discovery in a society which hold preconceived ideas of masculinity whilst facing complex relationships and contextual conflict. Likewise, *The Red Tree* explores the endless cycle of emotions associated with depression within a conformed community through open illustrations.