

Treatment of Human Rights Violations in *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas* of John Boyne and Mark Herman

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Abstract—Post-truth refers to people's dependence on emotional and personal beliefs rather than objective facts and evidence. The Holocaust is known as Shoah in Hebrew and Nazi Germany killed nearly six million Jews roughly two third of Europe's Jewish population during the World War II. The Nazis followed the path of their leader Hitler and portrayed Jews as the enemies of Germany who were responsible for the loss of World War I owing to their racism. John Boyne is an Irish novelist and he has written six novels, two novellas and a collection of short stories. His novels are published over fifty languages. His novel *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas* was published in 2006 and it was adapted into a film by the Director, Mark Herman in 2008 by the same name. This novel explores the themes of innocence, ignorance, and the devastating consequences of the Holocaust from a young boy's perspective. It revolves around the viewpoint of a nine year old boy named, Bruno whose father is the commandant of out-with which is known as Auschwitz, in charge of killing Jews. Bruno meets a boy named Shmuel, who is in a concentration camp. Bruno and Shmuel form a deep friendship. Bruno offers him food whenever he meets Shmuel, who feels hungry. They share stories and experiences despite the barrier of fence between them. Bruno meets a tragic end in the gas chamber with his Jewish friend Shmuel, who has earlier offered a help to him to find his father in the camp while wearing the striped pyjamas. In both the novel and film, people see the Holocaust from the perspective of the Germans instead of Jewish prisoners. German soldiers want to protect the fatherland by eliminating the Jews as a duty to create a better future. Some German citizens are against the idea of the holocaust but they are not allowed to pass their opinion publicly. At the end of the novel, the death of Bruno overshadows that of Shmuel and other Jews but from the objective point of view, one can see how the Jews have suffered from the violation of human rights. The paper analyses the violation of human rights, crimes against humanity, the right to life, freedom from discrimination, liberty and dignity during the holocaust by the Nazis against the Jews.

Index Terms—Post-truth, Nazi, Jews, Germany, Racial Discrimination, Innocence, Ignorance, Loss of Humanity, Holocaust, and Human Rights.

Post-truth is a term that refers to the personal beliefs and opinions which side-lined the objective facts and evidences. During the World War II, Nazi Germany used propaganda to spread anti-Semitic ideology and defended the violation of human rights. In 1920, Adolf Hitler presented Twenty-five point programme at the Nazi party meeting in that the fourth point stated that only German blood considered as the citizens of Germany and it excluded Jews as outsiders. The Nazis ``captured many countries and killed Jews and indiscriminately. During the German invasion of Poland in 1939, the Polish Jews were gathered and put into the newly established ghettos of the Nazis. The ghetto system was terrible one and the Jews had no savings left to pay for food and no chance to earn money. Nazis tortured Jews and used them as slave labour. They built concentration camps with the plan to indulge in mass killing by poisonous gas. They would like to completely wipe-out the race from the world. Millions of Jews were killed at the Auschwitz camp set up by Nazis. This was called the Holocaust known as the Shoah in Hebrew and the Nazis killed nearly six million Jews which was around two third of Europe's Jewish population during the World War II. John Boyne is an Irish novelist and he has written six novels, two novellas, and one collection of short stories. His novels have been published in nearly fifty languages. His novel, *The Boy in the Stripped Pyjamas* was published in 2006 and adapted into a film in 2008 by the same name, by the British Director Mark Herman. This historical fictional work explores the themes of innocence, ignorance, and the devastating consequences of the Holocaust. This paper analyses

the portrayal of the Holocaust in the film and the novel and its impact not only on the Jews but also to entire humanity. The Holocaust is often seen as a result of anti-Semitic and political endeavour of the Nazi Germany. The objective fact is that it is an act of grave violation of human rights and crimes against humanity. It reveals the darkest side of human history.

In the novel, *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas*, the writer presents the story with the point of view of a nine-year-old boy named Bruno and he employs the third-person limited omniscience narration. His father is appointed as the commandant of the concentration camp of Out-with. Bruno's sudden separation from his home, friends, grandparents and peaceful life in Berlin City to the Poland countryside brings an end to his joyful life. Being a young boy, Bruno dislikes his new home, which is isolated and he cannot find anything pleasurable to do there. The unsettled nature of the home puts him many questions. He does not know why the soldiers are very serious, what is his father's duty in the rough place, why there is no neighbourhood, why thousands of people on the farm are dirty, pale, bald, wearing the same striped Pyjamas, and living in the huts. These questions are haunting the mind of the young boy.

The novel begins with the playing of Bruno along the way returning from school with his three friends. He finds a big celebration in his home for his father's promotion as a commandant to Out-with. Bruno finds out that his belongings are packed by their Jewish maidservant, Maria. Bruno's mother informs them that they are moving to the countryside, for his father's job. She says, "You know how important it is, don't you?" (3) The new position of Bruno's father is considered to be pride to his mother but Bruno does not know about the importance of his father's job. Bruno remembers that führer, whom he pronounced as Fury's (Hitler) visit to his home has caused his family to depart from Berlin. Bruno's grandmother is upset at the party given for his father's new job. She asks Bruno's father "as if it makes you something special. Not even caring what it means really. What it stands for" (92). Bruno's grandmother considers that his son's taking charge of a concentration camp as a commandant is never a proud position. As a soldier's mother, she does not like the post as he is going to make the innocent people suffer. Bruno's father warns her mother not to publicly make an opinion and it is not appreciated in the country. For the better future of the country, they must

obey the orders of the leader and fulfil the duties assigned to them. Unlike his grandmother, Bruno's grandfather takes pride in his son's new position. Both in the film and the novel, a scene in which Bruno's family moves towards the countryside along with the Nazi soldiers who have forcibly taken Jewish families and loaded them in the truck, the Director and the writer primarily have focused on Bruno's disappointment and unwillingness to depart from his friends, city and beloved grandparents. Somehow, they highlight the young boy's emotions and his reluctance to leave his home. All of them move away due to the love for their country, Germany. Both the Director and the writer have not given much importance seemingly to the Jewish maid Maria who moves along with them. One could not find any scene dealing with her feeling during the departure. In fact, her life is in the charge of her owner.

Berlin City is filled with large shops, houses, neighbours, boys, vegetable and fruit stalls. On the other hand, Bruno's new home is devoid of any activity. The author writes that it is "an empty, desolate place and there were no other houses anywhere to be seen, which meant there would be no other families around and no other boys to play with, neither friends nor trouble" (11). Bruno feels that his sudden separation from the active and happy life in Berlin to the abandoned place has ended his joyful life of boyhood. Bruno finds it hard to adjust to the new home but his mother says: "We're here, we've arrived, this is our home for the foreseeable future" (15). Bruno's mother tries to convince him by saying that this new home will give them a better future. Bruno is unaware of the foreseeable future observed by his mother and he feels upset. He shares his disappointment to his sister Gretel about the new place. Gretel conveys to Bruno about the observation of their father that "whoever lived here at Out-With before us lost their job very quickly and didn't have time to make the place nice for us" (24). The leader says to Bruno's father that he is a man "who can do it right" (25). Gretel urges Bruno that their father has been sent to this place to create a better future for the country and they want to accept it as the home to support their father. Bruno is frustrated that no one is supporting him to return to his native. In the new home, Bruno feels lonely and his father is always busy with his work in his closed office. His mother is engaged with shopping and monitoring the housework and his sister is always playing with the

dolls. The soldiers are going in and out of his father's office in the home with their serious look which make the place more boring to him. Bruno discovers something through his window and shows it to Gretel: They witness what was happening not fifty feet away from their new home. Everywhere they looked they could see people, tall, short, old, young, all moving around. Some stood perfectly still in groups, their hands by their sides, trying to keep their heads up, as a soldier marched in front of them, his mouth opening and closing quickly as if he were shouting something at them. Some were formed into a sort of chain gang and pushing wheelbarrows from one side of the camp to the other, appearing from a place out of sight and taking their wheelbarrows further along behind a hut, where they disappeared again. A few stood near the huts in quiet groups, staring at the ground as if it was the sort of game where they didn't want to be spotted. Others were on crutches and many had bandages around their heads. Some carried spades and were being led by groups of soldiers to a place where they could no longer be seen. (36)

They find a higher fence and they can see the hut with only one floor. People are tall, short, old, young and all moving around according to the soldier's order. Bruno thinks that the place is a farm. He does not know the reason why all the people are bald and wearing a striped pyjama. Bruno observes some boys there and Gretel finds them as dirty. In fact, Germany has captured Poland and claimed ownership of the land. Germany forces their haters to give up their jobs and makes them as slaves in the camps. The Nazis have brought the opponents into the concentration camps and started to torture them.

Bruno finds Maria in his room with his washed, dried and ironed clothes. After some hesitation, she bows her head and walks silently into his wardrobe. Unlike his family members, Bruno treats Maria with respect and considers her as one among his family but she always keeps distance in their conversation. She addresses him as Young Master. Bruno enquires Maria about their new home thinking that she might not like it either. Maria hesitates to answer the question and she says that she could not answer the question. Indeed, being a Jew, she does not have the space to express her opinion. Bruno observes that maybe his father has done something wrong, so his leader has sent them to the awful place. Maria says that his father is a good man. She is grateful to him for taking her as a maid,

when she needs food and shelter after her mother's death. Maria's mother has worked for his grandmother when Bruno's father was young boy. This maybe one of the reasons for his father has taken her as a maid. Maria is indebted to his father because he has provided the medicine when her mother was sick. He has given her a job. She never wants to go against his father. After hearing Maria's past, Bruno realizes that:

After all, she had never done anything (as far as he knew) other than be his family's maid. He wasn't even sure that he had ever seen her dressed in anything other than her maid's uniform. But when he came to think of it, as he did now, he had to admit that there must be more to her life than just waiting on him and his family. She must have thoughts in her head, just like him. She must have things that she missed, friends whom she wanted to see again, just like him. And she must have cried herself to sleep every night since she got here, just like boys far less grown up and brave than him. (61)

Maria only wears a uniform and not any coloured cloth. Bruno identifies his position with that of Maria. She also has missed her people and cried for them. She is always quiet and often engaged in her job such as polishing the furniture, washing the clothes, helping in the shopping and cooking, and sometimes she takes him to school and brings him back. Bruno thinks that even though Maria has huge respect for his father, it is unfair that his father always scolds her as overpaid. Maria keeps quite for all his mistreatment and disrespect shown towards her. Though Maria is aware of the fact of the camp and the atrocities of soldiers committed against the Jews, she stays silent and ignores the surroundings. The writer and the Director portray the internal struggle of Maria and her indebtedness towards the Bruno's family. All these aspects are presented to the readers through the character Bruno's point of view. According to Wayne C. Booth, employing the limited omniscience in narrative that is taking the point of view of one or two characters can be considered as effective mode of narration. (*The Rhetoric Fiction*) Here the writer John Boyne has assumed effectively the limited omniscience over the young boy Bruno. He supplies the details to the readers through the point of view of the character. Through his observations and conversations with other characters, the readers could understand the various aspects of Second World War

Germany and the volatile situation prevailing in the country.

Bruno encounters the old, weak, skinny servant named Pavel from the farm who works in the kitchen and arranges their meals. When Bruno asks Lieutenant Kotler for help to find him a tyre to make a swing, he understands that Kotler is a serious soldier and even Maria and Pavel are afraid of him and never dare to look at him. He is always strict towards the workers and beats them cruelly if they commit some minor mistakes. Bruno dislikes Kotler because of his attitude towards the servants. He asks him for an old tyre. He orders Pavel, whom he calls "Hey, you!" (76) Bruno makes the swing with the help of Pavel. When Bruno falls from the swing, Pavel cleans and dresses his wound. He learns that Pavel has practiced medicine, and now he has become a servant. He wonders why he has become a servant to his family. Pavel's character reveals how the camp people are disrespected, mistreated and made servants despite their great skills and qualifications.

Bruno's father finds a home tutor for his children and the teacher's lesson always glorifies German history and treats Jews as enemies for their country. Bruno could not concentrate on his teaching. He finds history is boring, instead he wishes to read an adventure book. Bruno sneaks into the woods to find the farm which he has seen through the window when his mom has gone for an afternoon nap. Bruno ends up in a wired electric fence that prevents people from going outside the camp. He finds a boy in the camp named Shmuel who is pale and skinny on the other side of the fence. Their names are new to each other and they are surprised that they share the same birthday. Bruno starts to meet Shmuel regularly. Despite the barrier of the fence, their friendship grows deeply. Bruno has a habit of bringing food for his hungry friend. They start to share their stories. Bruno tells about his stories in Berlin, his new home, his friends and family. Shmuel says that his native is Poland. He has a beautiful family, the father, mother and brother. His father is a skilled watchmaker. They are living a happy life together with better food in their city until they are captured and moved to this place. Initially, in a small room, two families are forced to reside. He has never had a good sleep because of the outside noise. After some months, all of his neighbours are put into trucks and they have travelled through a suffocated horrible train and put into the present camp. His mother has been separated

from them. His father mends the boots of the soldiers in the camp. Though Bruno does not understand about the function of the camp, he feels bad for his friend. He tells Shmuel that he is also forced by his parents to leave all his close ones in Berlin to live in the place. Bruno enquires why they are wearing a number batch and if any other boys are there in the camp. Shmuel says that it is just a number given to him and there are hundreds of boys. Since, some boys bully Shmuel, so he always sits alone.

Bruno feels that his friend is going pale and skinny more and more, and the two become close. At home, Bruno asks his father about the camp and the farmers. His father says that they are not considered as people at all and there is nothing to talk about them. Bruno finds all the soldiers hate Jews and consider them as bad people just like his teacher. Shmuel hates soldiers because they cause suffering. Bruno responds that some soldiers are good, like his father, who is respected. Shmuel disagrees by saying that there are no good soldiers. Bruno asks the reason for the dislike and Shmuel says that because they are Jews. Bruno is shocked to know about the fact that his friend is a Jew. He realises that not all Jews are bad because he finds Shmuel as his best friend than his other friends. Bruno doubts about his father's role and his involvement in the cruel happenings at the camp. He watches a fake video which shows that his father and soldiers building happy homes for family and children. It makes Bruno feels better and relieved. Actually, it is fake footage created by the Nazi soldiers to hide the horrors of the camp from the eyes of the world.

Bruno's mother discovers from a soldier that the bad smell comes from the camp is the smell of burnt people in the camp. She wants to return to Berlin and she does not want to live the horrible atmosphere. Bruno runs to inform his friend about the move and learns that Shmuel's father is missing. Shmuel's father is burnt in the chamber alive. No one knows about the burning room of the camp. Shmuel thinks that they burn the old cloth. Bruno promises Shmuel to search for his father along with him the next day before leaving the place. The next day, Bruno has an idea to dig under the fence to reach inside the camp. For the first time, they are close to each other and there is no fence between them. Both want to hug each other for thanking one another but they feel awkward. Shmuel offers pyjamas and a cap for Bruno to make him one among them. They start to search for Shmuel's father. Bruno's mother learns

about Bruno's disappearance and informs her husband. After some time, Bruno and Shmuel are pushed inside the gas chamber along with hundreds of other Jews. They hold their hands together, not knowing what is happening to them. After some days, Bruno's father finds the clothes of Bruno left outside the fence and he learns about the death of his son whom he loves most in the world.

Both in the film and the novel, there is not much difference in the sequence of action. In the film, one can see, the visual representation of the action. Maria, Pavel and Shmuel represent the Jews and other people in the camps are blurred. The film neglects the furious and deadly character of Adolf Hitler. In the conclusion of the novel, Bruno could not be found after his disappearance and his family thinks that he may have been lost in the woods. After one year, Bruno's father has found his son's death. On the contrary, in the film, when Bruno, Shmuel and other Jews are asked to remove the cloth and pushed into the gas chamber and locked in, Bruno's mother and sister find his clothes outside the fence and start to cry. His father after a rushed search in the camp, sees the smoke from the chamber and shouts Bruno towards the sky. The movie ends with the chilling wide-shot image of countless of striped pyjamas. It highlights the brutalities unleashed against Jews by the Nazis. Both in the novel and the film, the characters, Maria, Pavel and Shmuel stand as the testimony to the horrors committed against the Jews during the Holocaust. However, Bruno's death has overshadowed Shmuel's.

The story of Shmuel, a nine-year-old boy inside the camp, who loses his home, family, boyhood life, freedom and education has been eclipsed by the death of the boy of Nazi officer. Shmuel is mistreated and beaten by the Nazis soldiers. His young eyes, always wait for his friend's food, which tear hearts of people. At the end, he has died with his only companion Bruno in the gas chamber without knowing his father, mother and brother also ended up like him. There are millions killed and suffered by the Nazi forces. In fact, the Nazis under Hitler have committed the cruelties and crimes against humanity by simply torturing and persecuting the Jews irrespective of their age and gender. It is not merely the violation committed against a certain community but a crime against humanity. Lydia Tischler is one of the holocaust survivors who shared her story in the interview appeared on the online YouTube channel, *Channel 4*

News, titled as "Holocaust survivor- Lydia Tischler-prisoner of Auschwitz" says that she was born in 1929 to Jewish parents. After German soldiers invaded in 1939, her father fled to England while Lydia, her mother and sister were trapped in Poland. In 1942, they were taken to Terezin and after to Auschwitz. Where Lydia's mother was murdered in the gas chamber. In the interview, she shares about her day-to-day survival in the camp. She has worked in the market gardens, sometimes they smuggle some of the fruits and hide them in their clothes. In the concentration camp in Terezin, she got acquainted with many inmates who were popular actors, musicians, writers and professors. She says that compared to younger people, the life of old people is worse in the camp. She observes that mistreatment at the young age could make a person cruel like Hitler. If a person is properly treated at his or her tender age, he or she will not be Hitler. (Channel 4 News 0:01- 9:20)

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