

# The boy in the striped pyjamas: analysis



Thesis: When boundaries like social, cultural physical and separations constrained Bruno's life, it never prevented him from forming a forbidden friendship

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John Boyne is an Irish novelist born in Dublin. He wrote 70 short stories and many novels focused on adults and young readers. *The Boy in Striped Pyjamas* is a novel focused on a younger audience. Several film adaptations were done to this film and in 2006 film adaptation was an award-winning Miramax. Furthermore, the novel won 2 Irish awards and received positive reviews by many papers. For instance *The Guardian* reviewed as, " A small wonder of a book...this is what fiction is supposed to do" (Boyne, 2010-2014).

*The Boy in Striped Pyjamas* is a fable which captures a hint of the holocaust but still has a great impact on our emotions. This is a story written from a 9 year old boy's perspective, who lived during World War II. In this story the 9 year old Bruno along with his family moved from Berlin to Poland due to his father's job promotion. His father was a Nazi officer who was recently appointed to the commander by the Fuhrer. As a result they were sent to an isolated area near the " Out With" concentration camp. (In reality it is Auschwitz Concentration camp in Poland). In this story Bruno felt the loneliness of the place very much. This is because they were home schooled and he had no friends to play with unlike in Berlin. Bruno being a curious and adventurous explorer started to explore the house he lived paying no heed to boundaries. One day he sneaked from the back door and ran through the

forest and ended finding a boy near a fence. He met the Jew boy Shmuel for the first time. They shared same birthday and age. Bruno sneaked every day to meet his friend near the fence as their budding relation prospered. One fateful day Bruno being a loyal friend to Shmuel decided to help find his dad trapped in the concentration camp. So he disguised in the striped pajama and crawled down the fence. Unfortunately, they ran into a death marching group leading to a gas chamber. They were naïve about what was about to happen as they walked into their death. It was their ill-fate that they were among the Jews who became the victims of the incinerators (Boyne, 2006). Despite the fact that Bruno was taught to hate the Jews as mortal enemies and his parents' constant warnings, he proceeded with his virtues. When boundaries like social, cultural, and physical separations constrained the 9 year old boys' life, it never prevented him from forming a forbidden friendship.

Bruno's family was portrayed as a rich family in Berlin as well as at Auschwitz. In Berlin they had a 5 story building in a position that entire city can be seen. Bruno says this in the story as he could see right across Berlin if he stood in his tiptoes as he held onto the window frame tightly. When they shifted to Poland they had a three story house with a rich life. There were servants attending to every need. However, in Bruno's room through the only small window, he sees a farm like place from a distant. The area doesn't look as lively as he thought it would be. His first impression was, " I don't think other children look at all friendly," (Boyne. p. 18) even though his mother taught him not to prejudice others. Furthermore, Bruno is brought up in a place where he couldn't interrupt his mother in any case. While they

were about to leave the Berlin house, when the servant Maria interrupts, Bruno immediately recalls the rule of not interrupting his mother. Likewise, he cannot disturb his father unnecessarily. His father pays importance in maintaining discipline and the kids are forbidden to question their parents' authority in decisions (Boyne, 2006).

Judaism is considered as a religion by most scholars but the Germans describe Judaism as ethnicity (Hollingshead. p. 4). During the holocaust due to this the two different groups were separated while the Jews behind a barbed fence deprived them from their lives. The Boy in Striped Pajamas reckons vast discrimination of Jews and Germans. For instance when Bruno and his family were travelling to Auschwitz they travelled by a train in which there were plenty of spaces for people to sit. On the one, Jews were tightly packed into the trains with undesirable conditions for a human being to breathe or live. "...transport arrived in Auschwitz on September 5, 1944 with 1, 019 Jews on board. Men and women were separated" (United States of Holocaust Memorial, 2013). Jews were treated badly because they belonged to a certain ethnic group even though both groups were headed to same destination. During the time when Shmuel described how they came to the camp Bruno found it hard to believe this since there was nothing like that in the trains they travelled. Moreover, having seen the documentary which shows the conditions and how the people were treated greatly influenced his little mind to believe things with in the camp were good (Boyne, 2006). As the two kids came to know each other more they ultimately believed each other more than the parents.

This is the main reason why Bruno in the end with natural reluctance, joined his friend in the concentration camp. While the Nazis separated the two groups of people, they however failed to recognize their own type. This proves that what they actually hate is the religion not the people.

While the Jews survived in misery, Germans had the choice to live. In this story Bruno was given all the freedom he wants within the household and beyond that he is deprived from this. For example the back door physically separated him from the surrounding. As he was not allowed to cross the door and the boredom pushed him to explore beyond it. Just like his tutor Herr Liszt encouraged in exploring, Bruno went pass the back door into the forest to discover new and interesting things just like the great explorers Christopher Columbus and Amerigo Vespucci (Boyne. p. 56). On his first venture he found the boy sitting near the fence and their small talks resulted to build the trust in which each promised to be friends for life (Boyne, 2006).

During World War II Jews and Christians were separated by the Germans providing bad conditions within the concentration camps. The Nazi officers removed their clothing and forced them to wear one “ striped pajama” as in the story. In this story Bruno asks Shmuel why do they always wear pajamas and he responds that is the only type of clothing they get to wear unlike Bruno who wears different clothing every day. The Jews barely get to eat and almost every day when Bruno meets Shmuel he is hungry and longing for food. When Shmuel was brought to commanders house to clean the wine glasses Bruno offered Shmuel the fancy foods they eat which ended poor Jew being beaten by the officer (Boyne, 2006). During this time children were subjected to child labor and many were killed just as they arrived the camp.

This is because the Officers believed that they are “useless eaters” (United States Holocaust Memorial, 2013), and immediately killed them in gas chambers.” Only 6 to 11% of Europe’s prewar Jewish population of children survived” (United States Holocaust Memorial, 2013). Shmuel, Paul (who comes to peel vegetable) and other Jews in the camp are always sad, whereas the Germans are happy despite their brutality to humans. Bruno however worries and questions Shmuel about these although some answers are hard to believe because of the good conditions they have been subjected to in their lives.

“ Holocaust was an event of such consequence and philosophical significance it seems to transcend the boundaries of time” (Hollingshead, p. 1). Through the eyes of Bruno the people inside the fence makes him sad. Although his sisters comment that they look “filthy” he rather says, “but maybe they don’t have any baths” than agreeing to the fact that they look dirty (Boyne, 2006). In a life where everything of Bruno is controlled by someone to a certain extent he manages to question certain behaviors and things even though he is not allowed to act differently in any circumstances.

Bruno is a free spirit and at such a young age he considers his own thoughts over others. He finds his own ways to overcome the boredom at his new house. One day he makes a swing for him although he gets hurt at the end. He formed a strong bond with the dirty Jew boy he said at the beginning making him believe what is important in life is to accept people for who they are.

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