

‘Facticity’ as Fate: An Existential insight into John Boyne’s *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas*

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Abstract: *Martin Heidegger’s facticity otherwise known as Thrownness is incorporated with the characters in the novel The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas. The individuals face existential boredom, because they could not make choice of their own, which leads to their self-deception and bad-faith. This paper highlights facticity in the life of a German boy Bruno, meanwhile, it throws light on Shmuel, the Jewish boy in the concentration camp. This article focuses on the existential crisis of both the innocents. It underscores the facticity through historical anecdotes. It also represents thrownness through the manifestation of misery in the minor characters. The research paper emphasizes on despondency and its repercussions based on the destiny of an individual in the conflict zone.*

Key terms: *Facticity, Bad-faith, Despair, Thrownness, Leap of Faith, Freedom, Choice, Self-Deception, Misery, Fate.*

John Boyne, the Irish writer gives a vivid picture of Existential conception ‘Bad Faith’ in the novel *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas*. The characters in the novel have no choice to make their own existence for survival. The writer depicts Bruno, the German and Shmuel, the Polish Jew as the symbol of humanity, whereas, the other characters fail to represent themselves with rationality. Bruno, the nine-year-old, respects the feelings and emotions of others with innocence. His father, Kurt, the commandant has no choice to fix his own life, because he must act according to the will of Adolf Hitler. As per the decision of the dictator, the entire family shifts from Berlin to Out-With in Poland. Bruno’s mother says “Some people make all the decision for us”(15). Kurt, as a rational being, knows reality and truth about life but he is not in a condition to accept things as per his thoughts. He knows that he is in a state of self-deception because of the facticity. He is totally haunted by the Bad Faith. In *Sartre Explained: From Bad Faith to Authenticity* David Detmer highlights Jean Paul Sartre’s views on Bad Faith as, “. . . there is no self-deception if I know the truth, while retaining for my own benefit a lucid awareness of this truth, deny it solely for the sake of deceiving another. So bad faith

requires that I both know the truth (so that my denial of it constitutes a lie, rather than a mere error), and not know it (so that I am genuinely deceived)". (75)

The commandant as a sensible person knows himself for sure that his family members would not be happy with the transferral, but there is no freedom given to them to make choice of their own which leads to despair. After shifting to Out-With, Bruno experiences the absurdity of life. He does not find friends to accompany him, resulting in existential boredom. The author expresses the gloominess of Out-With and loneliness of Bruno: "When he closed his eyes, everything around him just felt empty and cold, as if he was in the loneliest place in the world. The middle of nowhere"(14). The life of Bruno in Out-With appears as if he is in an absurd space where he could not find any one to converse and play with. He is depressed due to the state of alienation and emptiness which prevails around him. He is searching for a way to overcome the obscurity of life; he feels that his existence is meaningless in Poland. He expresses his agony "I hate this house, I hate my room and even I hate the paint work. I hate all. Absolutely everything"(58).

Bruno witnesses' strange things through his window. He could observe two smoke stacks along with plenty of huts and buildings around, in a far distance from his house, without knowing the danger in it. He calls it as "a nasty-looking place?"(34). He could not reason out the existence of those beings, who were in striped pyjamas. He also observes some people with bandages in their head, but he is unable to ferret out the intensity of circumstance around him. It is quite impossible for him to identify the place as a concentration camp for the Jews. The existence of Jews remains unstable due to hegemony. The writer uses the characters as a tool to express the anguish of Jews. The children in the camp appears as if they are from the ghetto. Their entire body is covered with dust and dirt, which proves the poor sanitation of the concentration camp. The Nazis have no heart to treat the fellow humans as humans due to the superiority complex mixed in their blood. It is very much evident with the words of Bruno and his sister Gretel. She says, "They look filthy . . . Those children look like they've never had a bath in their lives" (39). The Jews have no freedom or choice to stabilise the life based on their wish. In the text *The Dictionary of Existentialism*, Lawrence J. Hatab registers his notion on 'Choice' stating, "Choice in existential PHILOSOPHY is connected with the question of FREEDOM and the ultimate openness and groundlessness of the human condition. Existentialism rejects all forms of determinism that explain human actions as governed by forces beyond the control of the individual"(75).

Individuals think about pleasure and pain when they experience it. Likewise, Kurt tries to convince Bruno to make him feel happy to stay in Out-With. He knows the reason for his son's unhappiness of being lonely. As a lovable father, he is able to understand the problem of his son but as a sensible man, his heart is not ready to think about the sufferings undergone by the Jews, they are dislocated from their mother land; separated from their family members; sons and daughters crave for the love of mother and father. Nazis tested their emotion, but they remain one with their family like Kurt. He states, "A home is not a building or a street or a city or something so artificial as bricks and mortar. A home is where one's family is . . ." (49). The negligence of choice made them to suffer. Liberty has to be accustomed by an individual to enjoy the fruitfulness of life. Choice decides the fate of an individual. In conversation with Bruno, Kurt says "Bruno, sometimes there are things we need to do in life that we don't have a choice in . . . And I'm afraid this is one of them. This is my work. Important to our country. Important to the Fury. You'll understand that someday"(50). In *The Dictionary of Existentialism*, Richard Polt gives his opinion on freedom and choice in the chapter 'Humanism'. He says,

Thinkers in the existentialist tradition are concerned with concrete human EXISTENCE, particularly the CHOICES that shape one's life. But humanism

has two main currents: the first stresses the freedom of humans; the second stresses the distinctive quality of human nature (especially reason) that earns humans a privileged position in the universe.(185)

The anxiety within oneself is expressed through Kurt, though he is a commandant, he could not voice out to the Fury-Adolf Hitler. The writer mentioned Hitler as Fury throughout the text. He is called as Fury because of his attitude. Kurt and others in Germany act according to the will of Fury. He has given the responsibility of the genocide of the Jews. Kurt knows it is against humanity but responsibility falls on him which is inevitable. Lawrence J. Hatab in the chapter titled "Freedom" describes anxiety as: "The freedom of consciousness is accompanied by ANXIETY in the face of groundlessness of the human condition. Moreover, with nothing to guarantee or warrant choices, humans are susceptible for BAD FAITH" (160).

Bruno exposes the cruelty of the German soldier named Lieutenant Kolter against the Jewish doctor Pavel. He faces humiliation day-to-day life by listening and responding to the words of arrogant soldiers like Kolter. He shouts in front of Gretel and Bruno to prove his authoritativeness, which disappoints them. Bruno hates him because of his inhuman nature. Politeness and kindness are the unlikely quality for Kolter. He shouts "'Hey, you!' he shouted, then adding word that Bruno did not understand. 'Come over here, you – He said the word again, . . .'" (78). The arrogance of Kolter is expressed in the way he punishes Shmuel for eating the food offered by Bruno. Shmuel and other Jewish children are afraid of soldiers like Kolter because of the brutal attack against them. He says, "I don't think the soldiers like us I know they don't like us. They hate us"(201).

The children in Jewish concentration camp face torture, poor sanitation and malnutrition. Bruno observes Shmuel's hand: ". . . the hand of the pretend skeleton that Herr Liszt had bought with him one day when they were studying human anatomy" (172). Such occurrences describe the lack of nutrition among the Jewish children. Similarly, he perceives cleanliness through witnessing the pyjama of his Jewish friend. It looks very dirty and also, he could smell the bad odour from it. Likewise, the lice transmitted from his friend also transferred to his sister Gretel, but Bruno turns bald to get rid of them.

Both the friends share their fruitful past. They feel happy with nostalgia. They are displeased with the current scenario. Shmuel presents his past life in Poland; he states about his father's profession as a watch mechanic and his love for him. His father gifts a watch, he calls it as a precious possession. He recalls the history of Poland and its murky days. Similarly, the adults in the camp goes missing without any trace. It is not possible for the children to track down the mystery. Peter Longridge throws light on the German occupation on the Polish in *Holocaust: The Nazi Persecution and the Murders of the Jews*. The chapter "Persecution of the Jews 1939-1941" exhibits the viciousness of the Germans: ". . . from the autumn of 1939 onwards and which made provision for the 'resettlement' of the Jews under German rule into a 'reservation' in Poland. In the long term, given the inadequate conditions there, those transported to this 'reservation' were intended eventually to die"(147).

The German motto stays clear in the extermination of the Jews. During the conversation with his friend, Shmuel states thousands of Shmuels are there in the camp. He then expounds the journey from his native to the camp. He talks to Bruno about the unexpected drastic change in life. At first, the Germans insist the Jews to wear the Armbands with star that symbolises a Jew. On the meantime, in order to differentiate themselves, they appear with Swastika as a symbol of ascendancy. He expresses grief whenever he thinks about the bygone days. Once again thrownness haunted their life. This time they are forcibly removed from their residents and are moved to a room, based on the suggestion of the soldiers. The writer expresses the sense of belongingness through the tears of Shmuel. He

longs for his house because his family is forced to stay with another family in a single room. He feels miserable whenever he looks out of the window because he could witness his house through the window. His agitation with the environment is expressed: “. . . this part of the town was the bad part because it was always noisy and it was impossible to sleep. And I hate Luka, who was the boy who kept hitting me even when I did nothing wrong” (132). Equally Bruno shares his dislocation to his friend with grief. The transformation takes place due to the presence of Fury. He states “The Fury came for dinner, you see, and the next thing I knew we moved here.”(131). Eventually, both the lives are tied to a single knot. All the humans suffer in and around Germany due to the madness of Adolf Hitler, who is responsible for despair with the individuals there. In this novel, both the children face thrownness without realising their self. The life appears as if absurd and meaningless to them. Martin Heidegger, the German philosopher calls it as ‘Thrownness’. John Protevi, expresses the Heidegger’s ideology of ‘Thrownness’ stating,

It is the fact that Dasein does not choose to be yet nonetheless is, without fully understanding the origin of its EXISTENCE or its ultimate destination... in thrownness we are handed over to our being as a task, as something we must do, although the whence and wherefore of this being-handed-over remain hidden. Facticity is the CHARACTER of our being as something to which we are handed over... being lost in the publicness of the THEY.(457)

Shmuel continues his pathetic past in which he states the displacement of his family from the native to the camp. The German soldiers forcibly loading the Jews into huge trucks, which carries them to railway station. Shmuel says “The train was horrible...there were too many of us in the carriages for one thing. And there was no air to breathe. And it smelled awful.”(132). After reaching the station, they are taken to the camp, where he encounters another separation. The women are separated from their families. He is unable to meet his mother since then. In the camp, there is no freedom for the children to play. Constantly, the adults work from day to evening. The Jewish inmates lose their hope because of facticity. They know their ultimate destiny. Stephen Michelman in *The A to Z of Existentialism* elaborates ‘Facticity’ with reference to Heidegger stating, “Heidegger contrasts facticity with objective “factuality,” that manner in which facts about ourselves and the world are ostensibly true independent of how we experience them. In Heidegger’s account, *Dasein*’s facticity stands in tension with essential freedom—its capacity to determine itself according to its own choices and possibilities”(146).

The innocence in Bruno and Shmuel makes them like each other. The fence between them can separate their physique but not their soul. They are honest to each other. Bruno forgets his past after finding Shmuel in the form of “. . . speck nor a blob nor a figure, but a person In fact it was a boy” (108). Children imitate their parents and they act as per their words. At some instance, they unveil their observation like Bruno proudly utters ““We’re superior”(115). He expresses himself after listening to the conversation between his father and grandfather. Unconsciously, it is registered in the mind of Bruno. He unintentionally articulates it to his friend, but later on changes his option after finding dissatisfaction in Shmuel’s face. Later on, Bruno accompanies his Jewish friend on a mission to find his father, who is missing for a few days. His intention is also to explore something beyond the fence before leaving to his native. He goes along with Shmuel by wearing the dirty stripped pyjamas. When he enters the camp, he observes the agonies of the Jews. It appears to be a different world for him. He could not cope with the preconceived notions about the location, because everything appears strange for him. He finds,

. . . there were crowds of people sitting together in groups, staring at the ground, looking horribly sad; they all had one thing in common: they were all

terribly skinny and their eyes were sunken and they all had shaved heads, . . . two different types of people: either happy, laughing, shouting soldiers in the uniform are unhappy, crying people in the striped pyjamas, most of them seemed to be staring into space as if they were actually sleep.(214-15)

The author presents the novel with a historical background. Through tragic consciousness, he makes the readers to think about the importance of humanity. He puts forth the importance of responsibility in an individual with social realisation. Kurt forgets his responsibility as a father, which is responsible for the demise of Bruno. He could not realise his self, due to facticity. The German soldiers behave like the programmed robot for mission, to persecute and kill Jews. Herald Bloom in *Literature of the Holocaust* explicates the tragic consciousness in holocaust literature in the chapter "Tragedy and the Holocaust": "Holocaust usually describe the life of Jews who succumbed to or survived Nazi persecution. Their stories have both a historical and a fictional dimension. That these victims of violence possess distinguishing characters—of their conditions or their actions—that permit them to represent us, or at least most of us, seems to me indisputable"(50).

The writer stresses the importance of humanity through Kurt's mother Nathalie in a conversation with her husband Ralph and her son Kurt. She utters, "Looking handsome in your fine uniforms. Dressing up and doing terrible, terrible things you do. It makes me ashamed"(96). These words exhibit the humanity within Nathalie. She is very much concerned about the value of human life. Through her, the writer voices out his abhorrence on the German dictator. Boyle in his final chapter concludes the novel by stating, "Of course all this happened a long time ago and nothing like that could ever happen again. Not in this day and age"(223). The characters struggle throughout the novel due to 'Bad Faith' and 'Facticity'. The word liberty loses its worth when the soldiers surrender their self to the dictatorship. All the doors are shut for an individual, so emptiness prevails in one's life and life appears to be meaningless resulting in 'Bad Faith'.

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