



The Storytelling Game: Linguistic vs Sensory delivery of *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas*

Ms. Joen Melody N

PhD Research Scholar of English (F.T)
Nirmala College for Women (Autonomous)
Coimbatore – 641018

&

Dr. Manju Kumari K

Assistant Professor of English & Head
Nirmala College for Women (Autonomous)
Coimbatore – 641018

ABSTRACT:

This paper aims to compare and contrast the varied linguistic strategies used by John Boyne in *The boy in the striped Pyjamas* (2006) with the sensory strategizing of Mark Herman in his movie adaptation of the same name in 2008. The philological and cinematographic storytelling methodologies are analyzed to garner how each artist managed to convey the same sensitive theme of the dread and horror of the holocaust whilst strictly preserving the child's protagonist's innocence. The competence of their specific creative tools, the purpose achieved and the limitations managed within their specific creative platform is also examined to decipher the efficacy of each storytelling medium.

KEYWORDS: Storytelling, Novel, Cinema, Holocaust, Innocence, horror, Young Adult Literature, Comparative Media studies.

Introduction

Story telling is an expanding field that has seen the influx of a humongous number of prospective mediums owing to technological advancements in recent years. The domination of linguistic cannons like poetry, short stories and novels is now overhauled by sensory mediums like short films, documentaries, movies and reels where the written word is reduced to a rough draft meant to aid the final product from its escalated final product actually delivering the message. The study of all these mediums, their characteristic features, symbolic structures, their attributes and methods to entice and engross the message receivers into comprehending delivered subject is referred to as comparative media studies in narratology or storytelling. Ultimately, novels appeal to the readers generativity and employ their mental faculties to generate pictures of the words in their head and movies on the other hand are immersive where they do the image development on their own and enforce the viewers senses to perceive their creation.

The Novel vs Film Dynamic

The sequential information transfer happens in a novel through the medium of words or codes fashioned, arranged and delivered by the author. The reader receives the codes and generates an appropriate image using their imagination and creativity to comprehend the code. The novel experience is subjective. The creator or the author enters into a creative relationship with every reader where the authors' codes are interpreted differently by varied different readers. No perception or interpretation is alike being generated from the personalized creative psyche of an individual. If the novel says, 'Her hair shone like spun gold in the afternoon sun.' Every individual would have to procure their personal experience with the afternoon sunlight and shiny blonde hair to comprehend the line. "We live the characters, they become our own creation as much

as the author's and we experience their journey rather than simply observe it." (Calafiore). The author is dependent on a supposed constant that the reader knows what sunlight and hair means in his code delivery.

Movies convey their subject through sensory elements appealing to our auditory and perceptive faculties. They create a picture of the girl's blonde tresses floating in the warm breeze on the afternoon with the dust specs floating across the camera lens. We also see the specific emotions delivered by the color palette used in the sun's bright, golden rays on the girl's face and hair. The viewer is given a decoded message instead of a code to decipher and interpret with one's own imagination, experience and memory. The appeal is to invoke the emotions pertaining to the visual and sound waves presented by the director to reach the subject comprehension in one single easy step as opposed to novels where a two step process is needed. The delivered data is preordained and fixed where there is no need for creativity or imagination from the viewers part. They are supplied with the onslaught of prearranged data through their eyes and ears for the generation of an objective picture. The viewers are provided with the picture of the same girl, same shade of sun in the afternoon, the same shade of hair, the same pace of movement, the same sound of leaves rustling in the background creating a common delivered message.

The aspect of time has a unique influence on each of these mediums respectively. In a novel, time flows based on the pace of the reader. If they wish to read a page over and over, ponder over an analogy, skim through certain passages, they can do so. The novel has no power over how its content is delivered to the readers. Authors of books also have the freedom to deal with time as they please. The entire novel can simply describe a day if the author chooses to, or the novel can skip a few decades as per the author's fancy. If an author decides to tell the story backwards, he has all the freedom to do so. The reader on the other hand, has the privilege to flip back to the previous chapters or skip to the later chapters to comprehend the timeline. Time is simply a tool that is subject to the whims of both the code developer and the code receiver and interpreter.

In terms of the cinema and the film world time is a tool that tends to exercise a slight control over the creation of the content and the reception of the content by the audience. Viewers are subjected to watch a scene not at their desired pace but at the pace decided and prerecorded by the director. The frames every second are fixed and move only in that pace and order. Movies do not allow the viewers automatic pauses to make emotional adjustments with the progress of the plotline which is instead achieved by visual and auditory cues that force the viewers to settle into the projected perspective whether they chose to or not. Intense emotion generating elements like music, sounds, visuals garner the necessary comprehension of the delivered concept from the viewer. The reception of the message is outside of the control of the viewers. Both the director and the viewer are restricted by the time based limitations enforced upon them by the choice of their medium of the screen.

Novels are proficient in providing the internal picture of the character's mind. Undisclosed opinions and thought processes that contrast with the external behavior are displayed explicitly to the readers as "Novels have, for the most part, one tool and one tool only: language." (Werde) which is an abstract tool having the capability of expressing complex ideas through the descriptions procured by the tool of language. Movies on the other hand, cannot deliver the inner workings of a human mind using words. They instead rely on filmic and acoustic apparatuses like flashbacks, an audience only frame when the character's true emotions, actions and motives are revealed, eerie sound cues like a hidden laugh and creepy musical scores. The effects are further intensified by background elements like the setting, color palette of the frame and the camera angle.

The picture of the mind can be delivered by novels only in an ordered fashion for the author to procure a proper understanding of the plot progression and its associated emotions. This is achieved through an orderly description of the initial foundational details like the unclean floor, the cracked window, the rumpled clothes of the character, the slow descending of the sweat drops from the character's temples, the hastening rising and falling of the character's chest. Sound aspects like the creaking of the floor board, the ascending breathing sounds are also described. All these words are fashioned intricately in a sequential fashion to achieve the climactic secret of the hidden thought that the character is nervously anticipating something. But movies on the other hand, have the power to compile all these necessary visual, auditory elements required, within one single frame, in a single second, to achieve the same conclusive comprehension within the mind of the reader, if not in a more dramatic way.

Novels utilize the nature of words to present abstract concepts like the philosophical mind, corruption, fear and complex ideas like space, fantasy and infinity. They supply words over and over, in all perceptions and angles to explain an abstract idea to elicit a vague understanding in the minds of the reader. Movies have

trouble in this delivery of representing the abstract. They are rather proficient in displaying concrete and solid entities and ideologies. If they wish to portray fear, or confusion they decide on a clear picture of how the abstract idea looks like, and exaggerate it using sensory cues. If the director wishes to display fear he would present a shivering man, if he wishes to display confusion, he would depict a wild woman running here and there. Ideas like corruption are not philosophically explained but are depicted using images like a greedy general hiding away his bribe. Novels generate a conceptual understanding of abstract ideas, but films depict the concrete manifestation of the abstract concept in real life.

The medium of the novel attacks the mind and the intellect allowing the readers a personalized walk into the minds of the characters to form a psychological connection with the story and the characters. Since the pictures inside the mind of the readers associated with the words on the page are self generated, the readers' mind tend to form a personal attachment to the content delivered by the novel. The film on the other hand, attacks the sensory module of the human perception, the eyes, the ears, the heart and the mind. The onslaught is so intense and dramatic that the mind irrespective of being manipulated into sacrificing its own creative prowess for something from outside infiltrating its space, offers itself as a willing sacrifice to form a more physiological attachment to the content projected by the medium of the film. Both mediums achieve their goal of creating an impact in the minds of their respective consumers, only their methods and targets for inducing comprehension vary as suggested by a critic, "Differences in the raw materials of novel and film cannot fully explain differences in content. For each medium presupposes a special, though often heterogeneous and overlapping, audience whose demands condition and shape artistic content." (Bluestone, 31)

The war camp perspective: The Internal Mind and the Camera Acuity

The novel is depicted from the perspective of an innocent eight year old who had no comprehension of the realities of war or the severe race based cruelty normalized in his reality. The oblivious mind of the boy delivered the story with a lens of ignorance and innocence. The effect of this child like mind was demonstrated by the author using the mistaken words like 'Out With' and 'Fury' which corresponded to the actual words 'Auschwitz' and 'The Fuhrer'. The novel dragged the entire plot with its foundation on an unsuspecting child's gullibility depicted in the words "Perhaps I could come and meet your friends," (Boyne, 135). He wanted to cross over into the camp to play. Even at the advent of shocking pauses like the unexpected move to the new home, mother's behavioral changes, strange people in the house, a Jewish doctor working as a server, and the unquestioned violence depicted by Kotler, Bruno never came to a point of comprehending the truth. The depicted harshness was intensified by the reader's understanding of the reality when in parallel they were being frustrated at the boy's ignorant towards his demise.

The film does not depict the complexities of the child's ignorant mind owing to the lack of the word tool. But they generate a more sensual impact owing to idea, "the images in the film have more direct and immediate relationship to what it describes, while the words seldom do." (Bao, 58). Though they could only get as far as utilizing an actor that looks innocent enough, The director managed to deliver the dread of Bruno's circumstance by openly presenting the harrowing reality of the war camp through dialogues like "They smell worse when they burn", and the smoke from the camp chimneys, cruelty displayed by the German soldiers and the sickly actors portraying the Jews. These vivid images immediately procures an understanding in the viewers of the true monstrosity indulged by Bruno's father, but they also see the carefree and unconcerned Bruno attempting to play and explore creating a tension and a dramatic irony. As opposed to the slow burning frustration offered by the novel, the film offered an edge of a seat experience taking the viewers one step closer with every passing frame to the approaching doom of the innocent little Bruno.

Narrative Ignorance vs Sensory Ignorance

The novel generated Bruno's misguided perception of the camp being a happy go lucky place where people had fun through mental monologues and logical reasoning. He is seen ponder over the new developments using the trusted memories he had of his father 's kindness which made him conclude that the camp his father was in charge of, would definitely be a safe and happy place. The film on the other hand, owing to be limited by the abstract concept of a human mind, generated a sensory, concrete real life experience for the actor Bruno to procure his silly idea of the camp. The concrete idea was depicted through a new narrative where Bruno sneaks a look at a false propaganda clip developed by the Nazi generals where the camp seemed to have playing children, cafes and happy adults. The film uses this real life progression as the foundational lie that induced the ignorance in the child. The director produces an eerie irony where the viewers

watch a horrid truth where the child is watching a visual lie. The propaganda clip stands as a solid competition to the novel's internal monologues.

Plot pace: Slow vs Accelerated

The depiction of the timing events in both the novel and the film differ. The pace in which Bruno in the novel, relented to the move to Out With and gave up on his agenda to convince his parents was quite slow and emotional involving many angry outbursts, irritated dismissals and mental agony. But in the film the child's struggle with the move was constrained to a few frames including questions and sentiments. The exploration of the fence and friendship with Shmuel was yet another, prolonged exchange of many dialogues over many chapters displaying a more in depth relationship between the children. Whereas, in the film, the fence experience and friendship was again accelerated due to the limitation of screen time. But the film achieved all the missed emotional delivery by thrusting the readers into the overwhelming, final climactic onslaught of emotional piercing at the boy's tragic end.

Setting: Linguistic Description vs Color cues

The description of the physical space of the house was direct and detailed in the novel portraying Bruno's rejection of the place expressed in the words, "Bruno had a pain in his stomach and he could feel something growing inside him something that...would either make him shout and scream...or just make him burst into tears" (Boyne, 16). The description of father's room was yet another manifestation of the eerie complicated world of the adults incomprehensible to the boy, depicted with the words, "this room was something else. It had a very high ceiling to begin with, and a carpet underfoot that Bruno thought he might sink into. The walls were hardly visible;" (Boyne, 47).

Unlike Bruno's mental camera misspelling the entire reality of the concentration camp to his brain, a real camera does exactly the opposite in the film. Camera angles and sensory markers are utilized to differentiate between the house and the path to the fence. The house is filmed in a dark lighting that creates a gloomy and restrictive imagery intensified by the lack of music or tense sound cues in the background. The path to the fence, in distinction, is filmed colorfully depicting greenery with bright light and a joyful musical background. The film such markers to differentiate between Bruno's innocent world and the camp's terrible truth. The innocence of the child in the book is imitated by visual textures like keeping Bruno in focus while blurring the soldier's cruelty happening in the background which only the audience can see. And the image of Bruno seen through windows, banisters and car glass indicates the restricted, unaware nature of his mind. The film and the novel both achieve a dual display of innocence with a background display of horror.

Climax: Sensory Silence vs Sensory Overload

The novel provides a hauntingly disconnected description of the final scene expressed in the words, "Bruno raised an eyebrow, unable to understand the sense of all this,...And the room went very dark" (Boyne, 220). The words seem aloof and detached, they paint a picture of the boys being forced into a dark room, where they hold hands and the description ends with the author subjecting the readers to carry the brunt of the horror and the tragedy. The writing style stays faithful to the child's innocence cushioning the effect of the true revulsion, silencing all emotions within the space of the novel pages. The ending appears oddly silent, vacant and paralyzing. Only the readers feel the anticipation, the dread and the ultimate sinking of their hearts which is intensified by the lack of linguistic data that might offer a sort of release to the readers in regards to the happenings inside the gas chamber.

The Film on the other hand, offers an opposite description of the gas chamber climax. Bruno's mother and sister are seen in anguish and tears and Eliza's loud screaming wails at the fence crush the hearts of the viewers. The father is seen rushing to the camp with the panicked soldiers and the military dogs, frantically searching for Bruno only to stop and stare at the empty hut from which all the inhabitants have been taken to be burnt in the gas chamber. The chaos is intensified by the visual and sound effects of rain pouring down on all of them. The sound of the loud metal door shutting with the camera zooming out from the door finalizes the tragic point of film's climax where Bruno walked innocently into the room painted with the evidence of his father's genocide. The novel's silence and the film's explicit sensory assault achieve the same effect in delivering the panicked frustration associated with the child's innocence and the emotional heart break associated with the child's death right into the hearts of the audience.

Conclusion

It is pointless to argue the better of the two mediums. As each provided a canonical use of their respective textures to deliver the themes of Nazi horror through the experience of an innocent child. The novel had a generative impact on the reader imposing their personal mental faculties to produce pictures of its wordless, slow decent into the devastatingly painful narrative. The film procured an immersive experience for the viewers by dunking all of them into a visceral sensory sabotage of the melancholy themes. Therefore, like most critics argue the mediums of the novel and the film remain unique and increasingly impactful in their isolated spheres. Comparatively, the film and the novel do have limitations that might create a picture where one might seem better than the other. However, with the evidence of Boyne and Herman's prowess in handling the complex plot line, narrative complications, overarching emotions and the intricate themes of *The Boy in a Striped Pyjamas* (2006) through their respective medium, suggest very different. Both the novel and the film managed to make of for where they lack, with another tool or element associated with their specific field generating a flawless and influential piece of depiction, either way.

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