

Internal Focalization through a Child's Perspective in a Movie

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to examine how internal focalization techniques in the film *The Boy in the Striped Pajamas* can create dramatic irony conveyed through the perspective of an eight-year-old child whose knowledge is innocent and limited, namely Bruno. This study analyzes specific dialogues and also includes visual elements in the film using a qualitative descriptive approach. From this study, the results show that dramatic irony can be present through Bruno's misunderstandings, how he interprets the concentration camp, the uniforms used by prisoners, the numbers on the prisoners' clothes, and the crematorium smoke which he assumes is caused by burning "hay." Additionally, historical trauma is also subtly conveyed in this film, highlighting the suffering of Jewish people due to the Holocaust which impacts subsequent generations. The difference between Bruno's understanding and the audience's knowledge presents a strong emotional effect, with tension and sadness as well as the historical trauma present in the film.

Keywords: Focalization, Internal Focalization, Dramatic Irony, Historical Trauma, *The Boy in the Striped Pajamas*

INTRODUCTION

Internal focalization is a narrative technique that indicates through whose perspective a story is presented. This technique centers on a particular character, so it is that character's perspective which directs how events are narrated. It is related to the character whose point of view shapes the narrative. Regardless of who the narrator is, the story can be conveyed through the perspective of a specific character rather than through the narrator's own viewpoint (Bruhns, 2024). Through this technique, the story emphasizes the character's subjective experience, meaning that their understanding, emotions, and interpretations of events are presented only to the extent of what the character feels and knows. Internal focalization also builds emotional closeness between the character and the audience, as viewers are invited to see the world as the character sees it and to share the same limitations of information.

Internal focalization can create a different dynamic when it focuses on a child's perspective. In this context, a child's point of view tends to be filled with high curiosity without any suspicion within themselves. Children perceive the world without being burdened by social or political rules or complex conflicts, but rather through their personal feelings and experiences. Innocence is seen as a way of preserving the child's helplessness and is likened to a blank sheet of paper that has not been scratched, implying a purity that must be protected. Adults believe that preserving children's innocence is a way to safeguard their development from a world full of dangers (Hanifah, 2024). These limitations in understanding lead children to interpret situations through simple reasoning. As a result, the story places greater emphasis on subjective emotional experience, inviting readers to see the world as the child understands it with all its innocence and limitations.

In *The Boy in the Striped Pajamas*, the effect of internal focalization emerges through Bruno's innocent and limited perspective. Because the story is filtered through his understanding, the audience only knows what Bruno is able to see and interpret. This presents a sharp contrast between Bruno's limited understanding and the truth of what is actually happening. The Holocaust itself is a long-lasting historical trauma that affects not only individuals but also subsequent generations.

In the film, Bruno's limited and innocent perspective is clearly visible through the use of internal focalization techniques. Because the story is conveyed only through the eyes of a child, the audience only knows and sees what Bruno sees and understands. Therefore, a strong dramatic irony is created where the audience knows the situation that is occurring, but Bruno does not understand it. Through this approach, the film illustrates how innocence shapes the way someone perceives the world around them.

Research on internal focalization has also been conducted by several previous studies, including *Internal Focalization of Characters in Frankenstein* by Mary Shelley (Nurjaya et al., 2022) shows that the novel *Frankenstein* uses internal focalization by shifting the point of view among several characters, namely Walton, Victor, and the Monster. This shift in perspective allows readers to view events subjectively from different characters' viewpoints.

Furthermore, *Internal and External Focalization in the Novel "Beauty and the Beast"* (Khoerunnisa, 2024) explains the shift between internal and external focalization that shapes the characters of Belle, the Beast, and Maurice. By presenting different points of view, the narrative displays emotional changes between characters while themes of love, empathy, and transformation are present to strengthen the narrative.

Another study, *Analysis of Focalization: A Case of John Steinbeck's "The Grapes of Wrath"* (Noonari et al., 2024), analyzes that internal and external focalization techniques are used in the novel through more than one focalizer, including the narrator and several other characters. This shift in perspective creates a diverse narrative structure that does not focus on only one point.

From previous studies, it is evident that in the formation of a narrative, focalization plays an important role so that a story can be built and understood. Research shows how a character's point of view can influence the way readers interpret events and other characters through shifts in internal focalization or a combination of internal and external focalization. Based on this foundation, this study aims to discuss how the internal focalization originating from a child can function in the film *The Boy in the Striped Pajamas*. By analyzing how events are taken from the limited understanding of a child, namely Bruno, this study examines how the film does not present violence explicitly but through an innocent child's perspective; additionally, this film reveals how trauma can be buried and present in daily life.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Focalization was first introduced by Gérard Genette. He distinguishes between the narrator who tells the events and the point of view from which those events are perceived or presented. Focalization is a new concept in narrative theory coined by structuralists in response to the traditional concept of point of view. The traditional classification by using the terms taken from the pronouns used has brought about questions. The terms "first-person point of view" is traditionally used when the story is told as the personal experience of "I," "second-person point of view" when "you" is referred to the readers, and "third-person point of view" is used when the story is told as it happens to a given focal character referred to in the third person (Waldo & Man, 2023). According to Genette, perspective plays a crucial role in determining how information is presented and limited within a narrative. Genette divides focalization into three types, namely:

- 1) **Zero Focalization** This focalization is omniscient in nature. This means the narrator knows much more than the existing characters. The narrator can access the thoughts, feelings, and events that have occurred or will occur from various characters. There are no information limits in this focalization when conveying the story.
- 2) **Internal Focalization** Internal focalization is how the story is limited to the perspective of a specific character. The events and information presented are limited to what that character knows, feels, and understands. This technique creates emotional closeness between the reader or viewer and the character because the story is presented through that character's point of view.

- 3) External Focalization Meanwhile, external focalization shows the actions and behaviors of characters that can only be observed from the outside without knowing the character's thoughts or feelings. In this focalization, the narrator acts like a camera recording objectively, which results in the reader or viewer having to interpret the meaning behind the characters' actions themselves.

In the film *The Boy in the Striped Pajamas*, internal focalization presented through Bruno's point of view not only limits information but also brings forth an understanding of the concept of historical trauma which is the wound or trauma experienced by a group resulting from painful historical events such as war or genocide, impacting subsequent generations. In this film, it is conveyed how the Holocaust functions as a historical backdrop that provides the deep trauma experienced by many Jewish people.

Because the story is shown through a child's point of view, violence and cruelty are not displayed directly in the film, but rather through Bruno's innocent interpretation and ignorance. This is where dramatic irony is present, where the audience knows the reality occurring at the concentration camp, while Bruno does not. This makes the historical trauma feel more profound because the situation is presented through the eyes of a child who does not understand what is happening. Thus, internal focalization is a powerful way to represent historical trauma.

METHODOLOGY

This study uses a qualitative approach to examine dramatic irony in the film *The Boy in the Striped Pajamas* by analyzing textual and visual content. The purpose of this study is to examine the difference between the audience's understanding and Bruno's limitations in knowing the situation that is actually occurring. How dramatic irony is built through information limitations, dialogue, and visual representation is the main focus of this study. This study also discusses how a child's point of view plays an important role in strengthening the ironic contrast between innocence and historical cruelty.

Additionally, historical trauma is also used in this study to examine how the Holocaust is presented not only as a historical event, but also as suffering whose effects reach not only individuals, but also subsequent generations.

The film *The Boy in the Striped Pajamas*, directed by Mark Herman, is used as the primary data source in this study. Data are analyzed through the selection of scenes, dialogue, and specific visual elements that present moments of dramatic irony. Data collection was conducted by watching the film repeatedly, accompanied by the transcription of key dialogues that highlight the difference between Bruno's and the audience's understanding.

The data selection focuses on scenes that show the difference between what Bruno believes and what the audience knows. These scenes include Bruno's dialogues with his family members who try to hide the reality, Bruno's misunderstandings about the concentration camp, as well as Bruno's interactions with Shmuel. The main focus contributing to the construction of dramatic irony is the use of language and setting. Bruno's misunderstandings regarding the concentration camp, the prisoners' uniforms, and the crematorium smoke are primary examples of how dramatic irony is formed.

The data analysis process was carried out in several stages. First, scenes were selected based on specific criteria, focusing on Bruno's misunderstandings caused by the gap between his limited knowledge and the audience's awareness of reality. This included the selection of dialogue and scenes covering Bruno's interpretation of the camp, the prisoners' uniforms, and the smoke from the crematorium. The analysis then examined dialogue, characterization, and visual elements, observing how Bruno's language reflects his innocence. Third, the emotional impact of these scenes was evaluated, such as how the tragic effect emerges as evidence of Bruno's innocence. In the final stage, all findings were synthesized to explain how dramatic irony exists as a major narrative strategy in the film to depict historical tragedy.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The film *The Boy in the Striped Pajamas* presents dramatic irony because Bruno does not know the actual reality, and it also shows how historical trauma is depicted and can be present in daily life. Through internal focalization, which primarily focuses on Bruno, the audience experiences events from Bruno's very limited point of view, so everything emerges through his understanding. Violence is not displayed explicitly, but through hidden events that are left without further explanation. The difference between what Bruno interprets and what the audience knows creates a strong emotional response. Through this, the film illustrates that historical trauma can be present through simple things, such as the use of language, emerging misunderstandings, and adults who choose to remain silent and hide the existing truth.

Data 1

00:17:06 → 00:17:41

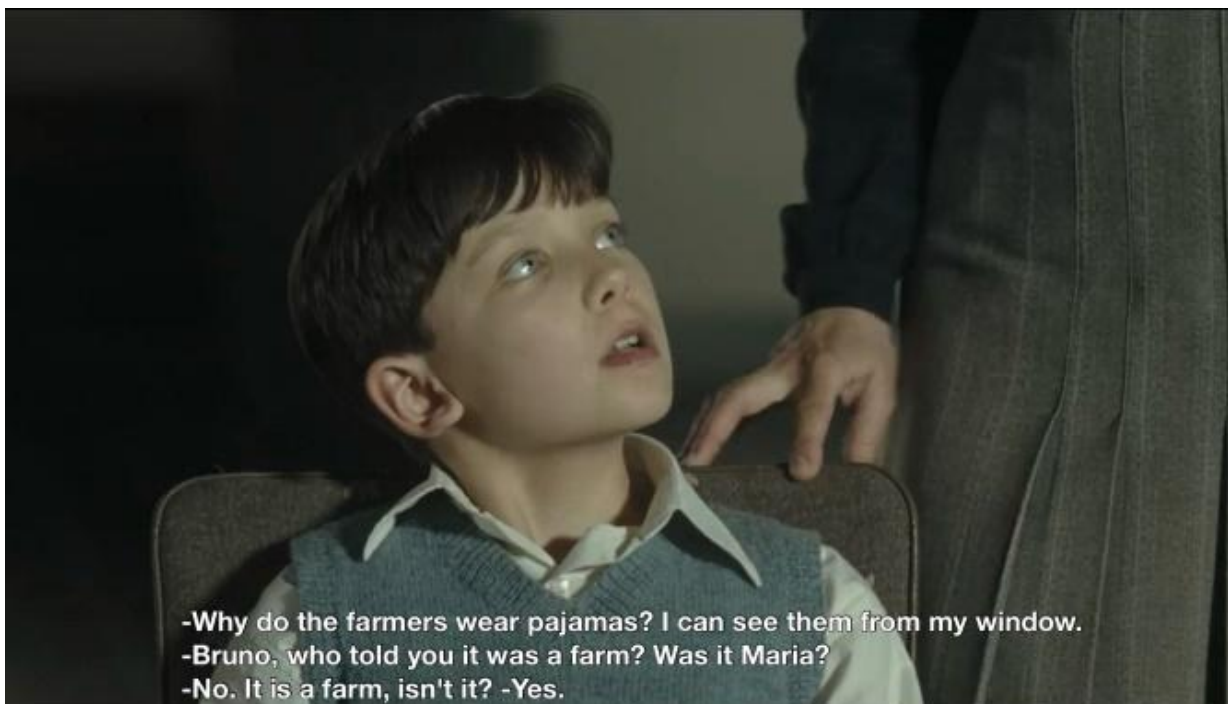


Figure 1. Elsa confirms Bruno's assumption about the "farm"

Bruno: "Why do the farmers wear pajamas? I can see them from my window."

Elsa: "Bruno, who told you it was a farm? Was it Maria?"

Bruno: "No. It is a farm, isn't it?"

Elsa: "Yes."

When Bruno refers to the concentration camp as a "farm," he truly does not know that the place is not an ordinary location. According to him, the people wearing striped uniforms are merely workers wearing "pajamas." However, the audience understands that the place is an area of detention and mass murder.

This scene shows how violence is hidden behind his innocent understanding. Historical trauma indirectly emerges because reality is covered up. When his mother, Elsa, confirms that the place is indeed a "farm," it becomes evidence that the truth is intentionally hidden.

This is one way in which historical trauma can continue. Trauma is always present not only because of the horrific events themselves, but also because facts are intentionally hidden so that the next generation does not fully understand the existing reality.

Data 2

00:34:43 → 00:34:59

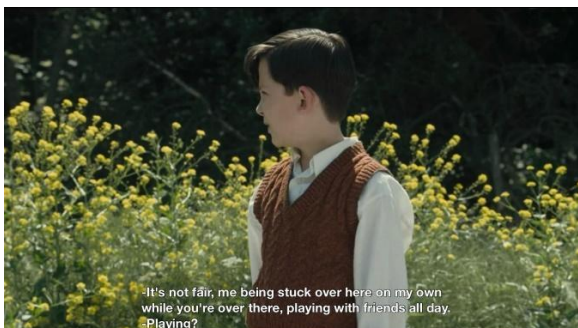


Figure 2. Shmuel corrects Bruno's misconception about the number

Bruno: "It's not fair, me being stuck over here on my own while you're over there, playing with friends all day."

Shmuel: "Playing?"

Bruno: "Well, that number. Isn't it a part of a game or something?"

Shmuel: "It's just my number. Everyone gets given a different number."

When Bruno thinks that the numbers on the prisoners' uniforms are part of a "game," he has no suspicion about it and considers it something ordinary with no special meaning. However, this is not the case in the history of the Holocaust. Those numbers are identities that replace the prisoners' names. They are called by the numbers listed on their clothes.

Bruno does not understand the meaning behind those numbers because he was not given an understanding of the reality occurring. He does not receive information about the concentration camp and how the prisoners are treated. Therefore, he interprets those numbers without knowing the truth and the suffering behind them. This shows how historical trauma is often hidden behind things that appear simple, even though they possess a deeper meaning.

Data 3

00:39:29 → 00:39:56

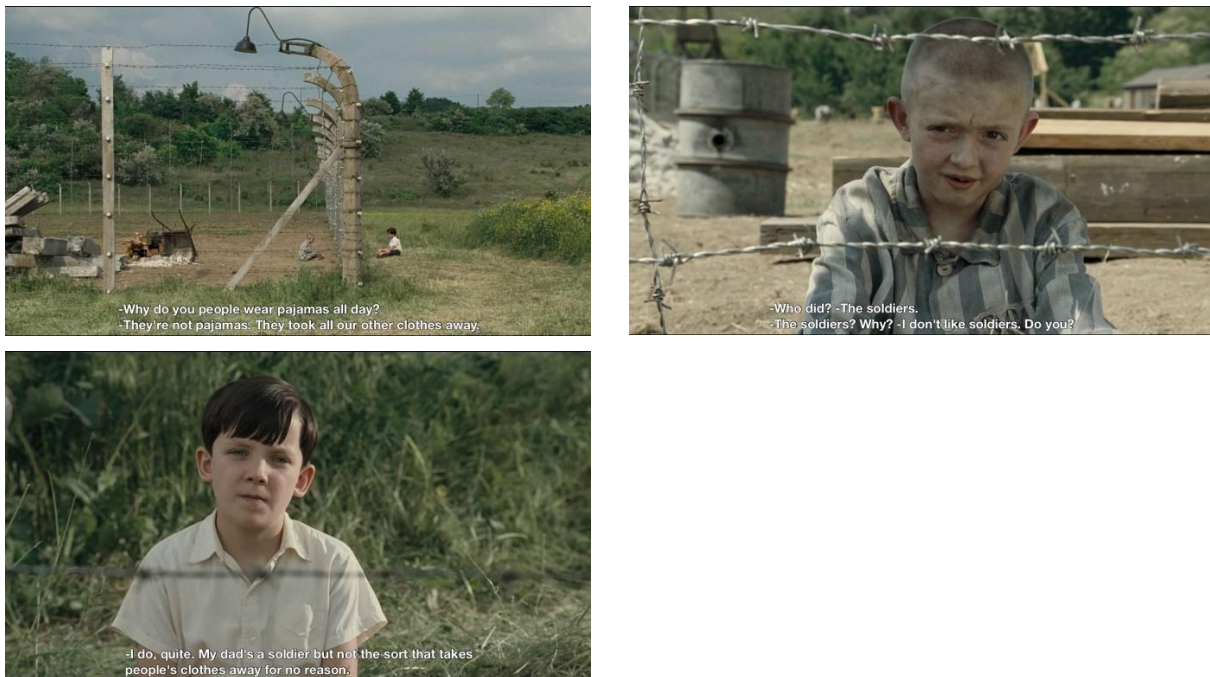


Figure 3: Shmuel explains about the camp uniforms to Bruno

Bruno: "Why do you people wear pajamas all day?"

Shmuel: "They're not pajamas. They took all our other clothes away."

Bruno: "Who did?"

Shmuel: "The soldiers."

Bruno: "The soldiers? Why?"

Shmuel: "I don't like soldiers. Do you?"

Bruno: "I do, quite. My dad's a soldier but not the sort that takes people's clothes away for no reason."

When Bruno misinterprets the prisoners' uniforms as "pajamas," he assumes they are just the clothes they usually wear every day. According to him, there is nothing suspicious about the clothing, but the same cannot be said for the truth. The striped uniforms are a symbol of the concentration camp, and their function is as an identity for the victims detained there.

In historical trauma, these prisoner uniforms are not ordinary clothes but a depiction of the suffering experienced by many people. The uniforms become a sign that someone has lost their freedom and their human rights have been stripped away. However, Bruno cannot understand this because he was never given an explanation of what was happening.

Furthermore, when Bruno describes his father as a good soldier, when in reality his father plays a role in the cruelty of that system, it shows how a system of violence can be hidden within a family life that appears normal and loving. Historical trauma often involves individuals who, in daily life, appear ordinary. This indicates that perpetrators in a system of violence do not always look cruel in daily life. Frequently, they continue to lead family lives that appear normal.

Data 4

00:40:47 → 00:40:56



Figure 4. Bruno questions Shmuel about the smoke from the chimneys

Bruno: "What do you burn in those chimneys? I saw them going the other day. Is it just lots of hay and stuff?"

Shmuel: "I don't know. We're not allowed over there."

"Burning hay" is understood by Bruno as the cause of the smoke coming out of the chimney near where he lives. He sees it as something that looks ordinary, just part of the activities on a farm. However, the audience understands that the smoke comes from the crematorium, which is the place where the victims' bodies are burned. This scene shows how mass murder can be presented through a simple symbol like smoke coming out of a chimney. In the Holocaust, the crematorium became one of the dark symbols because it is related to the systematic murder of humans.

The narrative perspective in this section can be analyzed through internal focalization, a condition where restricted information shapes how events are perceived. The focalizer's beliefs and comprehension determine which characters and circumstances are to be ignored or closely examined through the use of sight, hearing, feeling, taste or smell (Oliveira, 2017). In this scene, the audience identifies the smoke as a sign of mass killings based on their historical

knowledge, whereas Bruno perceives it merely as smoke from "hay and stuff." The absence of direct violence demonstrates that trauma can be conveyed indirectly through narrative elements.

Additionally, Bruno's misunderstanding represents how historical trauma can persist through hidden truths. Bruno is raised in an environment where adults withhold the truth, leaving him to interpret the world through a limited lens. This suggests that the continuation of trauma is shaped not only by past violence but also by the absence of open acknowledgment.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

Based on the analysis that has been conducted, it can be concluded that internal focalization taken from the point of view of a child, namely Bruno, is used in the film *The Boy in the Striped Pajamas* to display historical trauma. With limited information, where the audience can only see, feel, and understand the things that Bruno understands, a strong dramatic irony is created in this film between the innocence of a child and the audience's knowledge regarding the ongoing situation, which is the Holocaust. This gap exists not only as a narrative technique but also to strengthen the emotional impact present in the film.

Through Bruno's various misunderstandings, such as interpreting the concentration camp as a "farm," the prisoners' uniforms as "pyjamas," the prisoner numbers as part of a "game," and the smoke originating from the crematorium as "burning hay," this film shows how cruelty can be hidden behind things that appear normal.

This film shows that historical trauma exists due to the acts of violence themselves, as well as the denial and the hiding of the truth regarding the existing reality. Through Bruno's limited perspective, the audience is presented with the painful reality that childhood innocence can coexist with systematic violence. Ultimately, the internal focalization technique in this film conveys the tragedy of the Holocaust subtly yet profoundly, while also focusing on how trauma can persist.

For future research, researchers can explore representations of historical trauma through different narrative points of view, such as external focalization, to assess how the perspective can influence the emotional reactions of the audience.

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