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The Sins of the Fathers: Mark Herman's *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas* (2008) and Cate Shortland's *Lore* (2012)

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This article sets two recent international films featuring the children of Holocaust perpetrators in the context of united Germany's discourse about the National Socialist past. It draws on Karen Lury's *The Child in Film* (2010) and Murray Smith's *Engaging Characters* (1995) to provide a close reading of Mark Herman's *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas* (2008) and Cate Shortland's *Lore* (2012), and argues that while both directors appear to be using the child figure as a means of exploring the topic of Holocaust perpetration, *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas* not only reflects outdated understandings of the Third Reich, but also risks presenting the perpetrators themselves as victims. *Lore*, on the other hand, can be read as both a thought-provoking intervention into post-unification debates about German perpetration and victimhood and as an encouragement to non-German viewers to consider issues of perpetration much closer to home.

Keywords: Childhood; film; memory; Holocaust; perpetration

Vergangenes wird nicht vergessen.¹

Recent events to commemorate the seventieth anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz brought into sharp focus the ongoing and indeed increasing need to remember the Holocaust as it passes inexorably from lived memory: most obviously, this moral imperative encourages governments to institute public rituals of remembrance, such as the annual Holocaust Memorial Day itself. But precisely such public rituals may highlight a gulf between a culture of institutionalized remembrance and broader social attitudes. As early as 2002, Harald Welzer's sociological study *Opa war kein Nazi* had argued that there was a gap between united Germany's official culture of remembrance and private family memories of the Third Reich, highlighting the paradox that the third generation, which had benefited most from

I would like to thank Steffan Davies, Nora Maguire, Bradley Stephens and Ute Wölfel for their invaluable comments on early drafts of this article, and Sina Stuhlert and Juliane Schulze for their assistance in collating film reviews.

¹ 'Rede von Bundeskanzlerin Merkel anlässlich der Gedenkveranstaltung des Internationalen Auschwitz-Komitees zum 70. Jahrestag der Befreiung des Konzentrationslagers Auschwitz-Birkenau am 26. Januar 2015', <http://www.bundesregierung.de> [accessed 28 March 2015].

education about this period, found it near impossible to reconcile the ‘Lexikon’ of the time with their own family ‘Album’.² If one were to believe this generation, Welzer concluded, there were no Nazis in the National Socialist state.³

More recently, a study conducted by the Bertelsmann Stiftung established that 81 per cent of German respondents ‘prefer to put the history of the Holocaust behind them, and 37 per cent support that statement strongly’.⁴ The age of the respondents is an important factor here too, for while ‘67 per cent of the younger respondents below age 40 are in favour of closure, only 51 per cent of the older respondents agree with that position.’⁵ Such figures might suggest that the inhabitants of the ‘modern, forward-looking country, mindful of its history but not obsessed by it’ that Gerhard Schröder had envisaged on becoming Bundeskanzler in 1998 have now moved beyond even that ‘neue Unbefangenheit’ with respect to the National Socialist past.⁶ A combination of the political drive towards ‘normalization’ and the inevitable succession of generations feeds an increasing desire to regard this past as an ‘anomaly’ rather than as a permanent obstacle to developing a positive national identity.⁷

But of course, remembering the Holocaust is not just a matter for Germans: witness for example British plans to build a national Holocaust memorial and education centre in the wake of the seventieth anniversary commemorations.⁸ Nor has the idea that the Holocaust is a human rather than simply a German concern appeared only as the eyewitnesses die out; the question of who should learn about the Holocaust and how has its roots in the immediate

² Harald Welzer, Sabine Moller and Karoline Tschuggnall, *“Opa war kein Nazi”: Nationalsozialismus und Holocaust im Familiengedächtnis* (Frankfurt: Fischer 2002), p.10.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 248.

⁴ Steffen Hagemann and Roby Nathanson, *Germany and Israel Today: United by the Past, Divided by the Present?* (Gütersloh: BertelsmannStiftung, 2015), p. 21. Available from <https://www.bertelsmann-stiftung.de/en/publications> [accessed 28 March 2015].

⁵ *Ibid.*, p 22.

⁶ Stuart Taberner and Paul Cooke (eds), *German Politics, Culture and Literature into the Twenty-First Century: Beyond Normalization* (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2006), pp. 2 and 10.

⁷ Hagemann and Nathanson, *Germany and Israel today*, p. 25.

⁸ <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/history/world-war-two/11371241/Holocaust-Memorial-Day-commemorations-across-Europe-mark-70th-anniversary-of-Auschwitz-liberation-latest.html> [accessed 28 February 2015]

aftermath of these events, when it was expressed in discussions over how to use the footage of concentration camps being liberated.⁹ On the one hand, the American authorities were determined to use this evidence to educate the Germans, as demonstrated in the ‘hectoring short film [which] simply accused Germans of having committed these crimes’, *Todesmühlen* (1945); on the other hand stood the aborted British film project directed by Sidney Bernstein, *German Concentration Camps Factual Survey*, ‘an artistically shaped film with a much profounder message: humanity must take note of what had happened.’¹⁰ In retrospect, the fact that the American film went ahead without its British counterpart seems ominously symbolic: the message that human beings, rather than merely Germans, had the potential to commit such crimes has become evident in other ways since Bernstein’s project was shelved. As Claus Leggewie points out, while German Holocaust memorials, often on ‘authentic’ sites, acknowledge the guilt of the Third Reich, those who have been ‘taught better by the televised images from Cambodia and Rwanda, by the witnesses of other historical massacres’ know that such events can happen anywhere.¹¹

The gap between an institutionalized remembrance culture and individual or social resistance to remembering may be filled by cultural memory. Nor should this be seen as a second-rate stop gap, for literary texts and films have the potential to address the central issue that cannot easily be explored within the formal constraints of public remembrance: the question of how the Holocaust could have happened at all. The fact that this question remains both unanswered and compelling may explain in part the sheer volume of recent fiction written about Holocaust perpetrators, or even from their perspective.¹² Such fictions, whether literary

⁹ As discussed in André Singer’s documentary film *Night Will Fall* (BRI, 2014).

¹⁰ Kay Gladstone of the Imperial War Museum, quoted in *Night Must Fall* 1, 2:40 – 4:00.

¹¹ Claus Leggewie, ‘Seven Circles of European Memory’, *Eurozine* (2010), p. 1 at <http://www.eurozine.com> [accessed 28 February 2015].

¹² See *Representing Perpetrators in Holocaust Literature and Film*, ed. by Jenni Adams and Sue Vice (London; Portland OR: Vallentine Mitchell, 2013) for a stimulating collection of essays on this topic.

or cinematic, enable the reader or viewer without lived memory of these events to explore them vicariously, and moreover from an unaccustomed and even uncomfortable perspective.

This discomfort may become particularly acute when the Holocaust perpetrator is represented in film. Film's combination of visual and audio elements has a different sensory impact on its viewer from that of the literary text, and its potentially experiential quality can enable a more emotionally invested relationship with a traumatic past the viewer has not experienced, what Alison Landsberg refers to as 'prosthetic memory'.¹³ In his study of the way the Nazi past has been represented in post-1990 German film and TV Axel Bangert too suggests a 'turn towards intimacy and immersion', intended in part to allow the German viewing public to experience something of what it was to have lived through the Third Reich, and in part as an international marketing ploy; and as he comments in his discussion of Oliver Hirschbiegel's *Der Untergang* (2004), 'as the techniques for evoking close views are essentially those for creating viewer identification, it is crucial to determine what precisely the viewer is encouraged to identify with.'¹⁴ Bangert concludes that intimacy and immersion are 'not necessarily an escape from the political choices and ethical dilemmas of the past', but a means of unsettling and challenging the present day viewer, forcing them to ask profound questions about how they might have acted in the past and about their own identity in the present.¹⁵

This article will consider two recent films about the Holocaust produced outside Germany, Mark Herman's *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas* (2008) and Cate Shortland's *Lore* (2012), which lend themselves to comparison for two further reasons. First, both are based on literary texts, John Boyne's 'fable' (2006) and Rachel Seiffert's novel *The Dark Room* (2001)

¹³ Alison Landsberg, *Prosthetic Memory: The Transformation of American Remembrance in the Age of Mass Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), pp. 1-24.

¹⁴ Axel Bangert, *The Nazi Past in Contemporary German Film: Viewing Experiences of Intimacy and Immersion* (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2014), pp. 162 and 52.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 169.

respectively, and the transfer from textual to visual medium implies significant changes in the way perpetration is represented. Secondly, and most importantly for the present context, both films address the central issue indirectly, through the children of the perpetrators. The use of child protagonists further exacerbates the difficulties presented by the film medium, for if film's particular potential to engage viewers emotionally risks creating sympathy and identification with the perpetrator figure,¹⁶ then child protagonists create a further risk of inappropriate emotional investment. As Karen Lury points out, children are generally presented as 'perfect victims' of war and therefore the completely unquestioned recipients of viewer sympathies:¹⁷ to attempt to represent perpetration through child figures and even the child's perspective might suggest a reluctance to engage with the central issue at all.¹⁸

This essay will draw particularly on Lury's work on the representation of childhood in film and on Murray Smith's discussion of the complex ways in which viewers engage with cinematic characters. Smith replaces the unhelpfully broad term 'identification' with the idea of a 'structure of sympathy', which he defines as being made up of three interrelated concepts: recognition, alignment and allegiance.¹⁹ I will use these terms to suggest that Herman not only falls into the trap (laid by Boyne) of engaging the viewer's sympathies with the perpetrator's child as the ultimate victim of the Holocaust, but even risks extending Bruno's victim status to his parents. Shortland's film on the other hand avoids the pitfalls presented by both the child figure and the film medium to create a protagonist who resists our sympathy and (still more dangerous) passive identification.²⁰ I will consider both films in the context of the post-1990 discourse about the Holocaust in Germany, and will argue that while

¹⁶ For a discussion of the most notorious recent example, see Matthew Boswell, 'Downfall: The Nazi Genocide as Natural Disaster' in Adams and Vice, *Representing Perpetrators*, pp. 147-64.

¹⁷ Karen Lury, *The Child in Film: Tears, Fears and Fairy Tales* (London; New York: Tauris, 2010), p. 105.

¹⁸ See also Robert Eaglestone, 'Avoiding Evil in Perpetrator Fiction' in Adams and Vice, *Representing Perpetrators*, pp. 13-21.

¹⁹ Murray Smith, *Engaging Characters: Fiction, Emotion and the Cinema* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1995), esp. pp. 81-86.

²⁰ Lury, *The Child in Film*, pp. 105-6.

Herman's film presents what we might describe as a pre-1968 image of the Third Reich and the Holocaust, *Lore* can be read both as a thought-provoking intervention in post-unification German debates about perpetration and victimhood, and as a film that encourages the non-German viewer to consider issues of perpetration much closer to home.

The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas

JB: One of the occasional criticisms of the novel is about this naiveté of the boy and so on, how could they not know what's going on, but of course, that was the real life case.

MH: Yeah, and for grown-ups as well.²¹

The controversy around the historical (in)accuracy of Boyne's 'fable' about the Holocaust is well known and need not be rehearsed here.²² Central to my argument however is the sheer implausibility of the nine-year-old son of a high-ranking Nazi officer not knowing who the 'Fury' is, and apparently never having heard the word 'Jew'.²³ This ignorance is key to Boyne's presentation of childhood 'innocence' and ostensibly allows an equally ignorant child reader to discover the '[emotional] truth' of the Holocaust along with Bruno.²⁴ Moreover, while the adult reader might be expected to fill in the lexical gaps left by terms like the 'Fury' and 'Out-With', Boyne apparently extends his concept of naiveté to the adult writer and reader, when he refers to 'that naiveté [being] as close as someone of my

²¹ Audio commentary to the DVD of *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas* (Miramax, 2008) by Mark Herman and John Boyne, 48:12 - 27. Subsequent references to the audio commentary will appear as AC.

²² See for example Nora Maguire, "What Bruno Knew": Childhood innocence and models of morality in John Boyne's *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas* (2006)' in *What Do We Tell the Children?: Critical Essays on Children's Literature*, ed. by Ciara Ní Bhroin and Patricia Kennon (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Press, 2012), pp. 56-73 (p. 61).

²³ John Boyne, *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas* (Oxford: David Fickling, 2006), pp. 117 and 182. Subsequent references will appear as BSP.

²⁴ John Boyne, quoted in Maguire, "What Bruno Knew", p. 58. Both book and film – which has a 12A rating – are regularly used in British schools to introduce this topic, and educational materials for teachers available at <http://www.filmeducation.org/theboyinthestripedpyjamas> suggest that it is ideal for KS3.

generation can get to the dreadfulness of that time and place'.²⁵ The transfer from the textual to the visual medium, however, makes the illusion of Bruno's complete ignorance even harder to sustain: while the novel may be able to maintain the thinnest of veils over the historical context of the 'fable', the film must provide a local habitation and a name, and these are made instantly specific in the opening credits (0:00 – 4:00), as the viewer emerges from the red of a Nazi flag to look down upon a city square replete with swastikas.

Moreover, in a further scene invented for the film, this opening montage shows Bruno and his friends running straight through a group of Jews being rounded up. As they run on, oblivious, the shot widens to show a tenement in the midst of a razzia, and this suggests Herman's determination to depict the reality of the Holocaust, perhaps precisely to pre-empt the kind of criticisms made of Boyne's text. At the same time, the fact that a scene which was to have preceded and contextualized this sequence was deleted might suggest an equal determination not to allow the slightest hint of knowledge to intrude on Bruno's ignorance: it shows Bruno's friends mocking an elderly Jew who has evaded the round-up, while Bruno himself remains characteristically wide-eyed but silent.²⁶

This deletion appears consistent with other aspects of the film designed to emphasize and render more plausible Bruno's unknowing perspective on events which the viewer can now recognize with complete clarity. He is repeatedly referred to as '[only] eight', whereas in Boyne's text he is nine, and his ignorance is contrasted particularly sharply with his elder sister's increasing Nazification. Gretel's development is presented much more explicitly through the visual language of the film, notably her progression from our first glimpse of her in the opening montage, wearing a pale yellow dress, her blond hair loose, and playing with dolls, to the uniformed JM girl with plaits at Out-With. Conversely, the visual language of the

²⁵ Maguire, "What Bruno Knew", p. 58.

²⁶ Included in deleted scenes on DVD of *BSP*, entitled 'Mustn't go near them'.

film emphasizes Bruno's ongoing innocence when he is seen playing in sunlit woods, an echo of the Romantic image of childhood as associated with nature, spontaneous play and innocence.²⁷ In sharp contrast however, the film also repeatedly uses images of staircases and window blinds to create both vertical and horizontal shadows which put Bruno 'behind bars' and thus create striking visual parallels between him and the boy of the title.²⁸ These images, including Bruno himself wearing striped pyjamas on the train journey to Out-With (10:22 - 26) and on the night before the 'final adventure', when we see both boys in turn lying in their respective beds wearing their respective 'striped pyjamas' (1, 13: 50 - 14: 02), may have been created with the best intentions, in order to convey the message that whatever Bruno's father may say, all human beings are, indeed, 'people' (16:26 - 35), but they also serve to give objective weight to the belief articulated by the more obviously self-centred textual Bruno that he is as much a victim of adults as Shmuel.²⁹

If the film, even more than the novel,³⁰ makes the innocent Bruno the 'real' victim of the story, then still more troublingly, this victim status and the sympathy that accompanies it is extended to his parents. Herman's almost throwaway line in the audio-commentary quoted above is revealing for the presentation of Bruno's mother in particular, for while Boyne comments emphatically 'she's awful',³¹ the film softens the way this figure is presented in a number of ways.³² While the novel suggests a tense relationship between the parents from the beginning, the film's more linear narrative shows them dancing closely and smiling at the opening party scene (8:12 - 24) and thus suggests more explicitly that the tensions between them emerge only as the mother becomes more aware of the true nature of her husband's job.

²⁷ See Debbie Pinfold, *The Child's View of the Third Reich in German Literature: The Eye Among the Blind* (Oxford: Clarendon, 2001), pp. 12-15.

²⁸ AC 10:22 - 26.

²⁹ *BSP* pp. 110-11; pp. 127-8; p. 130.

³⁰ Maguire, "What Bruno Knew", p. 69.

³¹ AC 17:45 - 18:05

³² See also Maguire, who argues convincingly that in the novel women are presented as 'uncomfortable with and even resistant to National Socialist ideology': the responsibility for the regime is laid firmly on male authority figures. Maguire, "What Bruno Knew", p. 66.

Her reactions to Gretel's increasing Nazification (40: 14) and the tutor's influence on her (41:55 – 42:10) are also markedly more negative in the film, and a scene which does not appear in the novel shows her distress at a wreath from the Führer being placed on her mother-in-law's coffin (1, 06:00 – 6:30). Lieutenant Kotler's incredulous reaction when she responds with horror to his comment about the stench of burning Jews (46:28 – 50) might be read as a hint from the director that her professed ignorance is as implausible as Bruno's, but Boyne and Herman insist that this ignorance is based on their historical research: the father's vigorous defence of not initiating his wife into the true nature of his work (47:15 – 20), was based on their readings of the diaries of Rudolf Höss and the Commandant of Sobibor.³³ The mother's descent into alcoholism and the disintegration of her marriage are thus presented as a direct consequence of her husband's work. The physical resemblance between Vera Farmiga (Mother) and Asa Butterfield (Bruno), and between David Thewlis (Father) and Amber Beattie (Gretel) is not only important for creating a visually plausible family:³⁴ it also draws a dividing line between the true believers and the victims even within the National Socialist family.

The final sequence of the film is much more chronologically compressed and emotive than in Boyne's text, where Bruno's father is only able to surmise what had happened to his son a year after the event (*BSP*, 215-16). No stops are left unpulled in the effort to increase the dramatic intensity of the final extended parallel montage: Bruno and Shmuel's progress towards the gas chamber is intercut with images of Bruno's family searching for and eventually rushing to the camp to find him; the drama is intensified by changes in weather conditions (whereas it had been raining all morning in the text, in the film there is a suitably ominous crash of thunder as Bruno prepares to enter the camp and further strategically placed

³³ AC 47:50 – 48:10. Herman also notes that he invented the scene where Bruno observes his father and his colleagues watching a propaganda film about camp life 'to help explain Bruno's naiveté, or the naiveté even of the mother as well' AC 59: 16 - 30.

³⁴ AC 16:02 – 11

rumbles thereafter); and the whole sequence (1, 14:58 – 24:16) is underlaid by a powerful musical score that only falls abruptly silent as the camera cuts to the closed gas chamber door. Herman and Boyne point out that very little acting was required from the two boys in these final scenes: aged eight and ten, the simple fact of being jostled along by so many unknown extras was sufficiently frightening to produce a powerful impression of their fear and vulnerability, while the hand-held camera work conveys physically a sense of being in the midst of the throng.³⁵ The final shot before the lights in the chamber goes out is from Bruno's perspective, and shows a masked face dropping Zyklon B through the roof hatch.

In Smith's terms we are both aligned with Bruno and feel emotional and moral allegiance with him here; not only do we see from his physical point of view, but his trademark wide open eyes and mouth allow us to see one final time his complete lack of comprehension, now inflected with horror. As Lury points out, child figures are generally perceived as 'blameless' in war films, and our allegiance here is clearly with the innocent victim who finds himself in this situation simply for his kindness in helping Shmuel.³⁶ Herman's film is thus consistent with the tradition Lury identifies, best exemplified by the 'girl in the red coat' in *Schindler's List* (1993) of making 'one child's experience, or more accurately, their presence as a small, emotive figure [...] "stand in" for many deaths'.³⁷ But while it may seem entirely appropriate for the viewer to be allied with a child victim at this moment, it is more problematic that we are positioned so as to be in allegiance with the child of the perpetrator, rather than Shmuel.

Still more problematic is the way we are positioned in respect of Bruno's parents. If, as Smith suggests, recognising features that we know from real people is a basic prerequisite for our understanding of fictional characters, then parental feelings must be one of the most basic

³⁵ AC 1, 19: 13 – 32.

³⁶ Lury, *The Child in Film*, p. 105.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 107.

‘relatable’ qualities in the filmmaker’s toolkit.³⁸ Nothing in the film has suggested that the parents are anything other than devoted to their children, even if that devotion takes the perverted form of the father’s work, which he justifies as the means of creating a ‘better world’ for them (16:52 – 17:02). As Smith points out, the spectator is a free agent, who remains free to choose how to respond to fictional characters, as to those in real life; the viewer’s knowledge of the father’s work is therefore likely to create an antipathetic attitude towards him, which may well create in the viewer a desire to see the father punished.³⁹ And yet this desire is in conflict with our allegiance to his innocent child, whose death will be the instrument of retribution. We do not have to ‘identify’ with the commandant of a concentration camp to feel what Eaglestone refers to as a ‘terrible and possibly unjust sympathy’ for him as a father:⁴⁰ the viewer’s desire to see Bruno saved mirrors the parents’ own, and the desperation of their chase to the camp is presented in a visceral manner that makes it very difficult for the viewer to disengage from these figures.⁴¹ The painful screeching note as the father discovers the empty barracks (1, 24:00 – 24:15) and his bellowed ‘Bruno!’ as he arrives at the gas chamber (1, 24:33), followed by a cut to the mother and Gretel outside the fence, hearing the echoes of the father’s yell and beginning to wail in response, are such as to have an almost physical effect on the viewer, as the parents deduce the loss of their son simultaneously, but physically apart and unable to offer one another any comfort. The close-ups of their devastated facial expressions further produce what Smith terms an ‘affective mimicry’ that disrupts any potential moral judgements on them.⁴²

³⁸ Smith, *Engaging Characters*, pp. 82-3.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 41, 53 and 62

⁴⁰ Eaglestone, ‘Avoiding Evil’, p. 14.

⁴¹ In the featurette ‘Friendship beyond the Fence’ included on the DVD of the film, Boyne comments ‘the key to Bruno is that the audience has to really care about him [...] you have to be invested in his fate’ (10:50 – 11:05).

⁴² Smith, *Engaging Characters*, pp. 104-6.

The presentation of the mother's grief is particularly devastating as she is left holding her child's abandoned clothes, kneeling in the rain and mud. As Lury points out, mud is a frequent feature of war films featuring children, 'demonstrating what is exposed, is left, when the world is turned upside down, when the fragile civilisation that the child has barely understood has broken down'.⁴³ Lury goes on to suggest that the child's encounters with mud

allow the child figure to provide evidence, to evoke sense memories of struggle and abandonment that characterises their experience of war, but do so in a way that is not mastered or directed by language, and which may thereby provoke a response that, like its manifest content, is both messy and meaningless.⁴⁴

Significantly, while Bruno and Shmuel are seen splashing through the rain to the gas chamber, theirs is not the visceral encounter with mud Lury suggests here: indeed, they are still attempting to rationalize their experience, as when Bruno suggests that they have come inside simply to shelter from the rain (1, 22:00 – 22:04). The mother, grovelling in the earth and wailing inarticulately, is much closer to the representation of childhood that Lury suggests, and the viewer's own assumed response to this display of maternal grief is articulated as the camera retreats upwards as though unable to bear the sight. It returns to focus again on the father's haggard face, before finally presenting again the closed gas chamber door and slowly retreating so that the final images the viewer sees are rows of discarded camp uniforms.

Herman makes much of this final shot, which functions as a concluding counterweight to the opening scene of Jews being rounded up. It is designed to ensure that at the end of the film the viewer is not just thinking of Bruno or even Bruno and Shmuel, but of the larger numbers involved.⁴⁵ However, the undeniable understated power of this shot still feels weak in comparison with the sustained and ultimately intense emotional investment in individuals

⁴³ Lury, *The Child in Film*, p. 133.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 135.

⁴⁵ *AC*, 1, 25: 30 – 56.

(and particularly in one individual, Bruno) that had preceded it. While both Boyne and Herman clearly intended to use Bruno's naiveté and the reader's / viewer's emotional investment in him to provide an accessible means of comprehending the wider issues of the Holocaust, Herman, even more than Boyne, forfeits the principal advantage of using a child figure, namely the distinctiveness of the child's perspective. As Lury points out 'children [...] occupy a situation in which they are "other": other to the supposedly rational, civilised, "grown-up" human animal that is the adult' and can thus 'reveal the strangeness of the world in which they live'.⁴⁶ By appearing to show Bruno's mother too as ignorant of what is happening around her and presenting her as a victim, Herman elides the difference between adult and child and suggests that Bruno's perspective is typical for all but the most obvious perpetrators, his father and Lieutenant Kotler. Not only does the film, by dint of its medium, have to present a very specific historical context and thereby forego even the minimal pretensions to universality offered by the novel; by focusing on the 'wrong' victim and extending his victimhood to his perpetrator parents the film may move the viewer, but perhaps mainly because (s)he is allowed to identify passively with the child victim rather than explore the meaning of the Holocaust as a responsible adult.⁴⁷

Lore

Shortland's *Lore* (2012) is based on the second of the three thematically-linked novellas that make up Seiffert's debut novel about the immediate and longer-term legacies of the Third Reich, *The Dark Room* (2001).⁴⁸ Set mainly in the spring of 1945, it depicts the 12-year-old

⁴⁶ Lury, *The Child in Film*, pp. 1 and 14.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 105-6.

⁴⁸ For an illuminating discussion of how the novel was adapted, see Margot Nash, 'Unspoken Desires: Lore as case study on shadow narrative', *Journal of Screenwriting* 5 (2014), 343-53.

protagonist's attempt to get her four younger siblings from Bavaria to her grandmother's house in Hamburg after their Nazi parents have been interned by the Allied forces. Given the rediscovery of German wartime victimhood in the public discourse of the late 1990s, this text could easily be read as one about German suffering.⁴⁹ Yet Seiffert, born to German and Australian parents in 1971 and brought up in Britain, had based the events of 'Lore' on her mother's experiences in the aftermath of World War II,⁵⁰ and is much more interested in what it is to be descended from those on the wrong side of history than in depicting innocent childhood blighted by war. This focus is picked up and emphasized by Shortland, whose own interest in legacies of perpetration derives from her status as a descendant of first generation immigrants to Australia, from time spent living in South Africa, and from the German-Jewish ancestry of her husband.⁵¹ Thus while Seiffert's text is more historically specific than Boyne's 'fable', and the director emphasizes this by filming on location in Germany and indeed in the German language, Shortland claimed that the film was never intended merely to document the aftermath of the Third Reich, but rather to encourage viewers to 'have a conversation about history, about their own family, about Australia, about the world'.⁵²

Seiffert's text has an immediacy that lends itself to film adaptation.⁵³ She uses the present tense throughout as a means of suggesting the children's limited perspective and their hand-to-mouth existence on their arduous trek, and this sense of being 'in the space with them', without the benefit of hindsight or associated potentially judgemental commentary clearly appealed to Shortland.⁵⁴ Seiffert's text also emphasizes physical sensation over emotion in a

⁴⁹ For further discussion see especially the introductions to *Germans as Victims: Remembering the Past in Contemporary Germany*, ed. by Bill Niven (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), pp. 1-25 and *Germans as Victims in the Literary Fiction of the Berlin Republic*, ed. by Stuart Taberner and Karina Berger (Rochester, New York: Camden House, 2009), pp. 1-14.

⁵⁰ 'Interview with Cate Shortland', 'The Making of Lore'. Included in the DVD extras of *Lore* (Piffel, 2013), 01:44.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 0.57 - 1.30.

⁵² Stephen Fitzpatrick, 'Cate Shortland's World War II film aims to only connect' in *The Australian*, 1 September 2012.

⁵³ Helen Pidd, 'Unfinished business', *The Guardian*, 29 January 2007.

⁵⁴ Nick James, 'Interview with Cate Shortland' in *Sight and Sound* 23:3 (2013), 44-46.

way that is very precisely captured by Shortland's visceral film idiom. Nevertheless, the transfer to the visual medium still necessarily creates some shifts in emphasis analogous with those found in Herman's film. In Seiffert's text there are moments when the parents are presented purely in their parental role, as when 'He [Vati] finds her an extra blanket, tucks it round her, and when he kisses her goodnight she smells his sweat, feels the stubble on his chin.'⁵⁵ Similarly tender moments feature in the film, for example when Lore flies into her father's arms when he arrives unexpectedly at the family home (2:34 – 36), but the visual medium makes it impossible to ignore his military uniform and gives a particular frisson to Lore's comment that despite his long absence, she would have recognized her father anywhere, a comment later revealed to be dreadfully prophetic. The process of 'Vati emptying drawers, Mutti filling bags, the soldier loading the truck' (*DR*, 68) before the family flees to the countryside is also made much more specific as the camera focuses briefly on the spine of a file that suggests that Vati has been instrumental in shaping the eugenics laws (4:09 – 12). There is thus an increased emphasis on the parents' complicity with the regime brought about in part simply through the media transfer.

However, other changes to the literary template are not necessitated simply by the move from textual to visual. Shortland both invents and alters episodes in order to emphasize the issue of perpetration, and while Herman makes his Bruno younger than his literary counterpart, Shortland makes her Lore fifteen rather than twelve. Shortland explained this decision by her desire for a love interest,⁵⁶ but the additional three years also help create a film Lore who has been exposed to Nazi indoctrination for longer and is much more articulate, indeed at times vehement, in expressing it. This is particularly obviously in her interactions with the ostensible Jew Thomas, whom the siblings meet on their trek; her physical need for intimacy

⁵⁵ Rachel Seiffert, *The Dark Room* (London: Heinemann, 2001), p. 69. Subsequent references to this edition will appear as *DR*.

⁵⁶ James, 'Interview with Cate Shortland'.

is diametrically opposed to her most basic beliefs. Seiffert's text, like Boyne's, first mentions the word 'Jew' at a relatively late stage: only in autumn 1945 when a stranger explains to Lore who the piles of corpses depicted in the newspapers are, is the word first mentioned in her hearing, a literary sleight of hand which contributes substantially to the impression of the literary Lore's ignorance / innocence. In the film, on the other hand, the look on Lore's face when Thomas shows his papers to the American soldiers demonstrates that she instantly understands their significance: she subsequently spits at Thomas: 'Ich weiß, was du bist – du bist Jude!' and forbids him from touching the other children (56:22 – 40). Her violent physical rejection of him as he grabs her leg is followed by a cutaway shot to her younger sister Liesel skipping: as in the opening montage, where images of Lore taking a bath are juxtaposed with those of Liesel playing hopscotch, Lore's erotic potential is ostensibly contrasted with the innocent, playful aspect of childhood, which might simply serve to emphasize Lore's increased age. However, in both cases the visual focus on Liesel's feet and the auditory qualities of the scene (the slap of the rope on the barn floor; the chink of a pebble on the hopscotch court) also suggest standing on solid ground, and so emphasize what is clear from Lore's ideology-saturated language: that even at this stage she is a despairingly committed Nazi.

Thus, while *Lore* provides increased emphasis on the parents' political guilt, there is no obvious counterfoil in an innocent child protagonist or perspective. The opening montage of *Lore* suggests a more complex image of childhood than that of pure innocence embodied in Bruno: images of Lore bathing, Liesel playing hopscotch, and a brief but sharply focused image of a swastika on a piece of uniform apparently laid out for Lore to put on (though we never see her wearing it), suggest a multi-faceted construction of childhood as traditionally innocent and playful, but also eroticized and politicized. Liesel's skipping between the end squares of the hopscotch court, marked 'Himmel' and 'Hölle' suggests these children's status

between the established myth of childhood innocence and implication in their parents' political guilt, and the ostensibly sharply differentiated images of the two sisters, one on the verge of womanhood, the other still a child, are inextricably linked through the voiceover of a girl's voice counting, referring both to Liesel's game and the strokes of a brush through Lore's hair.

The presentation of Lore oscillates between images of a helpless child and of one who has not merely taken on but fully internalized the Nazi beliefs of her parents. An early incident invented for the film version serves in part to close the gap between 'Vati' and 'Nazi', in part to present Lore as the helpless victim, when, just before the family leaves home, her father shoots their dog. Neither the viewer nor Lore witnesses this event: seconds before the father has told Lore that the dog will be looked after by neighbours and sent her inside. As the gunshot is heard we see a full screen image of Lore flinching in response - indeed, the viewer may well flinch in response to the same stimulus, creating what Smith terms an empathetic reaction⁵⁷ - before her father strides wordlessly past her, straightening his uniform: a tiny gesture which concisely expresses his self-perception as first and foremost a serving officer. Lury equates animals with children in their blamelessness and thus perfect victimhood, which 'make the wrongs of war seem all the more wrong and the viewer's righteous and explosive response all the more satisfactory'.⁵⁸ Thus, while the viewer has barely had time to establish an emotional connection with Lore or her family, the death of the 'innocent' dog immediately allies the viewer with the equally powerless Lore against her father, and the ostensibly domestic incident both undermines Lore's image of 'Vati' and prepares the ground for more distressing revelations to come.

⁵⁷ Smith, *Engaging Characters*, p. 102.

⁵⁸ Lury, *The Child in Film*, p. 105.

Shortland also adapts episodes from Seiffert's text to emphasize the theme of perpetration, in particular the key episode when Lore first sees photographs from concentration camps. In the novel, Lore's uncomprehending perspective and her frustration at her lack of understanding are clear:

In front of Lore is a picture of a rubbish heap, or it might be ashes. She leans in closer, thinks it could be shoes. Below each of the photos is a place name. One of them sounds German but the other two don't. All unfamiliar. The glue under the photos is still wet, the paper is wrinkled, and the images confusing. Lore squints, frustrated, hot in the silent crush. She steps forward out of the group, smooths out the damp creases with her palms [...]

The pictures are of skeletons. Lore can see that now, pulling her hands back, tugging her sleeves down over her glue-damp palms. (*DR*, 103)

The textual Lore sees only photographs of victims and we are aligned with her defamiliarizing perspective as she moves closer, acquiring greater visual, if not intellectual clarity. The process of understanding her father's possible role in these events comes only later, in the autumn of 1945, and is still marked by a degree of uncertainty and / or denial as she scans the newspaper bearing reports of war trials where the photos contain 'familiar black collars with bright lightning flashes' (*DR*, 202) but while 'Some wear Vati's uniform, none have Vati's face' (*DR*, 203).⁵⁹ In the film however, while Lore initially sees an authentic Allied poster entitled 'Diese Schandtaten, Eure Schuld' depicting concentration camp victims, this is complemented by a further (anachronistic) image of Nazi perpetrators.⁶⁰ Moreover, there is a small but significant shift in the way Lore's engagement with these images is depicted. Whereas in the novel she uses her palms to smooth the pictures and increase their legibility, and the 'glue-damp palms' evoke sweating palms as a symptom of stress or anxiety, the film suggests a more precise and intimate engagement with the photographs as she uses her finger tips to smooth the face of one particular soldier who

⁵⁹ In Seiffert's text, the kind of certainty Shortland's Lore achieves about her father's role is reserved for the post-1990 character, Micha.

⁶⁰ The original poster can be viewed at <https://www.deutsche-digitale-bibliothek.de/item/D3J2UCUSRLDIGJ4NJ4QRBU4B4E2D7HFM> [accessed 16 January 2015].

appears to be shooting a Jewish victim. This is later reinforced by the very sensuous close up of Lore lying in bed in a displaced persons' camp, attempting to prise apart her thumb and index (or trigger?) finger: we both see and hear the glue still clinging to them as she tries in vain to get rid of it, an image which further suggests the impossibility of extricating herself from this legacy and which, in its resonance beyond the merely visual, has the capacity to speak powerfully to a much wider audience.

Disturbingly, this image is underlain by a whispered background discussion in which two women sleeping nearby complain that they have had to queue for hours to look at dead Jews simply in order to get bread. *Lore* is unflinching in representing both the physical and the mental state of German civilians at this time:⁶¹ the fact that physical survival is necessarily uppermost in the population's mind has already been made clear through the images of children scavenging for food immediately preceding Lore's discovery of the concentration camp images. The film medium and the child protagonists allow Shortland to create a powerful shorthand for debates about German victimhood which does not avoid their complexities: while Lore's gesture as she tries to rid her hands of the glue neatly evokes Nazi perpetration and provides the 'obvious' answer to the women's whispered complaints, at the same time, repeated images of baby Peter crying with hunger demonstrate the inadequacy of such a response.

The overall texture of this film creates a very strong sense of alignment with the children, and in particular with Lore. They are the central characters throughout; distressing images of wartime brutality, such as the body of a woman who has been raped and murdered (29:52 – 30:32) are presented through their largely uncomprehending perspective; and, like many of the war films featuring children discussed by Lury, the overall form and aesthetic of the film

⁶¹ Richard Bessel, *Germany 1945: From War to Peace* (London: Simon & Schuster, 2009) provides a detailed account of this period. See esp. pp. 336-9.

are reminiscent of that most childlike of narrative forms, the fairy tale.⁶² The children are abandoned in the forest by their wicked parents and have to make their way to their grandmother's house, encountering *en route* various modern-day incarnations of witches (the old woman who is still devoted to the Führer and wants to keep baby Peter as a means of getting food from the Allied forces) and wolves (the predatory boatman who wants sex with Lore). The children's uncomprehending perspective creates the curiously 'flat' style characteristic of fairy tale, where the most improbable events are related as though self-evident, to powerfully defamiliarizing effect:⁶³ the film eschews the familiar end of war clichés of a rubble strewn landscape in favour of lush, often sunlit countryside and woods which, as in *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas* might evoke a Romantic myth of childhood innocence.

Nevertheless, the very clear associations with the Grimms' *Märchen* and the conservative ideology that in some sense paved the way for the Nazis⁶⁴ provides the sinister undertow to the images of the children playing in the woods, and suggests that the critic from the *Canberra Times* who objected to the aesthetics of Shortland's film may have missed their point. Referring to the 'danger of sticking so closely to Lore's constricted perspective' which runs the risk of rendering the historical setting unreal, he comments: 'Next to an authentic postwar landmark such as Roberto Rossellini's *Germany Year Zero* (1948), the whole of *Lore* seems impossibly decorative and remote.'⁶⁵ This judgement completely ignores the enormous chronological gap between the two films, and the fact that in the intervening period the Third Reich and the Holocaust have become global ciphers for evil. Rossellini's film, as summed up in the opening intertitles and voice-over, was a direct appeal to its audience to take pity on

⁶² Lury, *The Child in Film*, pp. 105-44.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 140.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 127.

⁶⁵ Jake Wilson, 'Casualties of war', *Canberra Times*, 22 September 2012.

an indoctrinated German youth and to do whatever they could to help that youth live again.⁶⁶ Shortland's film does occasionally invite the viewer to see the children purely as innocent victims of war and its aftermath, notably when Günter is shot at the border to the Russian Zone or when baby Peter repeatedly screams with a hunger his siblings are powerless to satisfy. But painful as such images and sounds are, we have little if any access to the younger children's subjectivity: our main point of access to the film is via the highly indoctrinated Lore, whom the majority of critics found deeply unsympathetic. Nevertheless, while some reviewers would clearly have felt more comfortable with a more 'embraceable' film, one which 'would let the audience in a bit closer',⁶⁷ overall the unapproachability of the protagonist and the allegedly 'decorative' aesthetic seem more a strength than a weakness. Unlike *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas*, *Lore* is not an invitation to empathize or indeed identify with a single innocent child, but to experience with Lore the horror and frustration of her situation and its much longer-term ramifications for herself and for Germany, and to ask ourselves how we might act in a similar situation. Its aesthetic does not tell or appeal with Rossellini's directness, but uses a more experiential approach such as identified by Lury when she draws on Emma Wilson's analysis of *Lilya 4 Ever* to suggest that film can create a connection between the child and the adult viewer which is not merely visual or pictorial, but which moves us in a 'visceral and confusing' way, less about feeling sorry for the child than feeling the child's physical sensations and being aligned with them.⁶⁸

The films in the German context

Both *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas* and *Lore* had moderate box office success on their release in Germany: Herman's film made \$45,035 in its opening weekend, and in just over a

⁶⁶ Roberto Rossellini, *Germany Year Zero* (Mondial, 2010), 01:10 – 02:30.

⁶⁷ Kevin Jagernauth, 'Review: 'Lore' Is An Evocative & Enigmatic Look At Post-WWII Moral & Emotional Fallout', 6 February 2013, <http://blogs.indiewire.com/theplaylist> [accessed 16 January 2015].

⁶⁸ Lury, *The Child in Film*, pp. 133-4 (p. 134).

month had achieved a total gross of \$218, 186; Shortland's film grossed \$225, 864 within the first month.⁶⁹ But while both films thus appear to have attracted decent sized audiences, their critical reception differed considerably. In the case of *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas* opinion was divided: the fact that Herman had shown the inside of the gas chamber and his use of the child's perspective were sometimes praised as brave aesthetic decisions; other reviewers however criticised the historical inaccuracies, the clichéd images, and what they saw as the cynical commercial exploitation of the Holocaust for entertainment. One of the more thoughtful reviews attempted to resolve the contradiction between what its author called 'eine ästhetische Frechheit und geschichtspolitische Blasphemie, wie sie sich ein deutscher Autor niemals und ein deutscher Regisseur schon gar nicht hätte erlauben können' and the fact that German audiences clearly found the film deeply moving:⁷⁰ his explanation, that the film convinces by deploying powerful historical images and cinematic clichés, is plausible as a means of explaining the film's international success, but I would argue that there are more specific features that explain its success with German audiences.

Whereas both *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas* and *Lore* emerged into the era after German unification, only Shortland's film reflects the shifting relationship to the National Socialist past that resulted from that event. The fact that Lore sees an anachronistic image of her father committing atrocities, for a German audience at least, inevitably evokes the Wehrmachtsausstellungen of 1995 - 1999 and 2001 - 2004, the destruction of the myth of the 'saubere Wehrmacht', and the realization of just how many 'ordinary' Germans were implicated in atrocities on the Eastern front. *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas* on the other hand reflects and reinforces what we might call a 'pre-1968' image of the Third Reich and the Holocaust, driven largely by an understanding of this era as the work of a Nazi elite.

⁶⁹ For comparison, the domestic film *Der Untergang* grossed \$6,434,048 in its opening weekend. All figures from <http://www.boxofficemojo.com> [accessed 15 March 2015].

⁷⁰ Andreas Kilb, 'Auschwitz als Fiktion: "Der Junge im gestreiften Pyjama"', *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 6 May 2009.

David Thewlis's performance as Bruno's father, and the fact that this figure is seen largely from Bruno's perspective, may challenge an earlier simplistic belief that Nazis were merely sadistic monsters, but this does not alter the fact that for the viewer, perpetration is exemplified almost exclusively by this one high-ranking officer. The fact that Bruno's mother and Gretel appear essentially as easily duped willing followers also presents us with an outdated image of women's passive role, even victimhood, in the Third Reich.⁷¹ And Gretel's increasing Nazification is signified largely by external signs such as her JM uniform: this suggestion of her largely institutionalized Nazism may recall the speech of the Reichsjugendführer, Baldur von Schirach, at the Nuremberg Trials, where he admitted responsibility for training young people to follow Hitler and absolved the young people themselves of any responsibility for the regime's crimes.⁷² Responsibility for the Holocaust is thus assigned primarily to the 'obvious' perpetrators, the Nazi elite, while the audience is allowed to align itself with Bruno's naiveté, ignorance, or what two critics described more damningly as his 'Weigerung, sich als Teil der Welt zu begreifen'.⁷³ Andreas Kilb is doubtless right to suggest that no German team could have allowed themselves to produce such a film: and yet the takings at the German box office, and still more, the fact that the film is used in German schools,⁷⁴ suggest that this external perspective on the Third Reich has been adopted by a younger generation of Germans as a means of legitimising their own understanding of the Holocaust as a terrible event, but one in which they and their families are not implicated.

⁷¹ Claudia Koonz, *Mothers in the Fatherland: Women, the Family and Nazi Politics* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1987), pp. 3-5.

⁷² Ann Tusa and John Tusa, *The Nuremberg Trial* (London and Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1983), p. 376.

⁷³ Johannes Breit, Till Hilmar, 'Die starrenden blauen Augen der Unschuld', *Gedenkdienst: Verein für historisch-politische Bildungsarbeit und internationalen Dialog*, 4 (2012), p. 5.

⁷⁴ http://www2.mediamanual.at/pdf/filmabc/19_filmabcmat_Der-Junge-im-gestreiften-Pyjama.pdf [accessed 30 March 2015].

Lore, as we have seen, reflects more fully the complex debates surrounding the Third Reich in post-1990 Germany and poses a much greater challenge for a generation that appears keen to draw a line under this past. Shortland was aware of the post-unification debates surrounding German wartime victimhood, and of the provocation her film offered German audiences:

They always talk in Germany of the ‘regime’: ‘the regime did this’ or ‘the regime did that’. And what this film does is say: ‘my grandfather did this’ or ‘my father did this’ or ‘my mother did this’. It’s inside the family and trying to deal with it on a personal level.⁷⁵

Unlike Gretel, Lore is never seen in BDM uniform, and in contrast with Bruno’s father, we are never entirely sure what function Lore’s father has or the extent of the crimes he may have committed: these are ‘everyday’ Nazis who are presented primarily as individuals rather than as members of institutions, and the audience is denied any vantage point that might enable us to form straightforward judgements on them. In contrast with *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas*, the German critical reception of this film was almost uniformly positive, with the vast majority of reviews highlighting in particular the fresh perspective on this period provided not just by the focalization through Lore, but also by the international team behind the production. As with *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas*, a number of critics noted that this film could not have been made by an all-German team, but here the tone was entirely one of approbation and even gratitude for a film which presented the period ‘ohne deutsches Barmen, aber auch ohne hochmütige Verurteilung.’⁷⁶ One critic may stand for many when she refers to Shortland looking ‘aus der Teenagerperspektive auf die bekannte Historie’, thus opening ‘den Blick für eine frische, rohe Wahrnehmung’.⁷⁷ This strategy suggests Shortland’s understanding that a generation saturated with information about the Third Reich

⁷⁵ ‘Glasgow Film Festival: Cate Shortland on Lore’, *The Scotsman*, 14 February 2013.

⁷⁶ Peter Uehling, ‘Erlernte Härte’, *Berliner Zeitung*, 1 November 2012.

⁷⁷ Anke Sterneborg, ‘Aus der Kindheit gerissen’, *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 31 October 2012.

without being able to feel any personal connection to it requires an experiential aesthetic: as Lawrence Langer argues, if readers with no direct experience of the Holocaust are able to cope with the historical fact of the gas chamber with equanimity, but reject images like the gouged out eyeballs of the ploughboy in Jerzy Konsinski's *The Painted Bird* as 'too horrible to be real', then it is because that physical image makes them feel like 'potential victim[s]'.⁷⁸ Perhaps it is not too much to suggest that the visceral aesthetic of Shortland's film is designed to bridge an even wider historical gap, and to make present day viewers, whether German, Australian or British, feel like potential *Mitläufer* or even perpetrators.

Both films create a fictional space where the 'why?' of Holocaust perpetration can be explored and the consequences confronted, but while *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas* is unusually confident in its ability to represent the 'unspeakable', the aesthetic texture of *Lore* problematizes issues of representation, knowledge, and judgement throughout. The figure of Bruno certainly succeeds in making the topic more accessible for younger audiences, but however brutal his fate, this child figure ultimately offers both child and adult audiences easy answers to difficult questions; he reduces the Holocaust to the work of his father and allows the viewer to identify passively with his own victim status. Shortland's *Lore* on the other hand, forces not only German but international audiences to engage with the questions afresh.

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⁷⁸ Lawrence L. Langer, *The Holocaust and the Literary Imagination* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1975), pp. 175-6 (p. 175).

Saunders) of *Remembering and Rethinking the GDR: Multiple Perspectives and Plural Authenticities* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013).