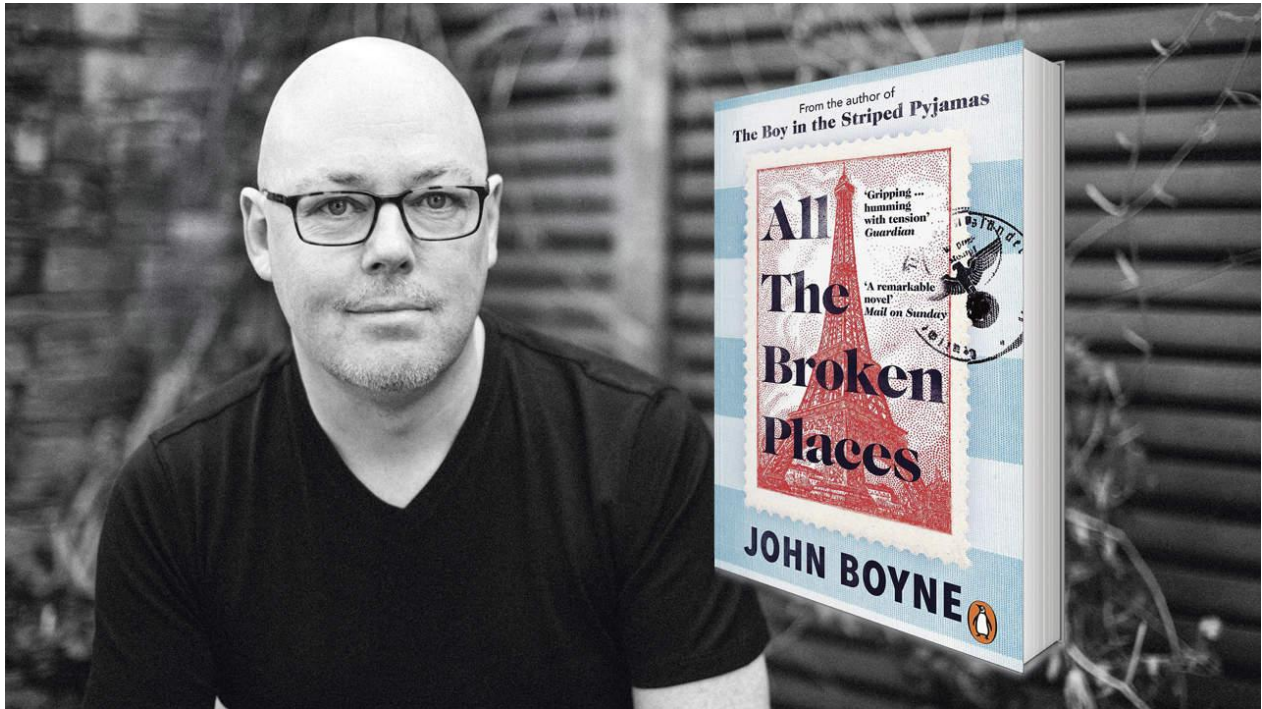


# Horror and Healing: John Boyne [C1]

Con “All the Broken Places”, lo scrittore irlandese prosegue la storia del celebre romanzo “Il bambino con il pigiama a righe”, in cui affronta i temi legati al senso di colpa dei sopravvissuti, confrontandosi con un pubblico sempre più esigente.



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The novel *The Boy in the [Striped](#) Pyjamas* was a global phenomenon. Written for a young adult (YA) audience, in the years since its release in 2006 the book has become a reference for [awareness](#) of the horror of the Holocaust. Now, award-winning Irish author John Boyne has published a sequel called *All the Broken Places*. This book is [aimed at](#) an adult audience. In his first book, the subject is delicately handled in a way that is understandable for children. This sensitivity characterises Boyne's work, whose novels cover some of society's most difficult [issues](#). His most recent young adult novel, *My Brother's Name is Jessica*, deals with transgender identity. To find out more, Speak Up contacted Boyne. We began by asking him why he chooses such controversial subjects. **John Boyne** (Irish accent): For many years in my career, my books didn't produce any controversy at all. It was really only in the last sort of four or five years that people seem to get sort of inflamed about some of them, pretty much starting with *Jessica*. Like a lot of writers, I

guess – I just instinctively trust myself to write the book I want to write at the time. And it's pretty much the only book I can write at that time: that this is what I need to write. And maybe the topics that have interested me the most in recent years have been those that have been part of the 'culture wars' and the ideas of what we can and cannot write about in contemporary fiction and what publishing will accept or won't accept. And in some ways, I wish it wasn't the case, because I don't actually like being seen as somebody who is out to provoke others in any way. That's not who I am as a person or as a writer. I just really want to just tell a good story.

## HISTORICAL ACCURACY

The Boy in the [Striped](#) Pyjamas remains Boyne's most well-known novel. It has been adapted into a movie, a play and an opera, while the book, of which eleven million copies have been sold in fifty-eight languages, has become [required reading](#) in many schools. In recent years, it was subject to criticism on social media, leading the Auschwitz-Birkenau Museum [to issue](#) a [statement](#) in 2020 that it should not be read for historical accuracy. Boyne argues it was never intended to be a textbook. **John Boyne:** You know, I wrote it as a children's book. I wrote it as a fable. I didn't expect it to become this massive bestseller. It took a long time, took about thirteen years before this [backlash](#) happened, where people were saying, "Well you shouldn't teach this in schools because it's a novel, it doesn't get all the facts exactly right." But what they forget is that I didn't write a schoolbook. I wrote a novel. I didn't write it to be taught in schools. And there is this perception that I've done something wrong by that. But if teachers choose to use the book in schools, [that's up to](#) them, but I would also expect that they have the sense to be able to point out to kids the difference between a fable and real life.

## THE SEQUEL

In The Boy in the [Striped](#) Pyjamas, two nine-year old boys [strike up an unlikely friendship](#) at the Nazi concentration camp Auschwitz-Birkenau: Bruno, the camp commandant's son, and Shmuel, a Jewish

prisoner. In *All the Broken Places*, Boyne [ties up loose ends](#) with the story of Bruno's [elder](#) sister Gretel, now in her nineties, this time, writing for an adult audience. **John Boyne:** I knew I wanted almost for it to balance *The Striped Pyjamas*, in the sense that the first one is from the point of view of this very naive child and the second one is from the point of view of a very [wise, elder](#) ly lady. And my age is actually [halfway](#) between the two between the nine and the ninety-one. And I thought it would be a very interesting thing to see the story and the history of what happened during those times from the complete polar opposite of who Bruno was in the first book and look at it from Gretel's perspective. I also kind of liked the idea; I couldn't really think of a young person's book that had a sequel by the same author that was then written for an adult audience and I thought it was a nice, interesting literary thing to do.

## **SURVIVOR GUILT**

*All the Broken Places* [revolves around](#) survivor [guilt](#) and how generations of Germans have psychologically dealt with the horrific acts committed by some of their [countrymen](#). It is a topic that has been largely ignored by the literary world. **John Boyne:** I've got German friends who I've talked to about this and it's obviously a very complicated thing for the national psyche — I think that's a story [worth](#) telling. It doesn't mean that I'm ignoring the stories of the real victims at all. It's just telling more stories. And we are told that we should keep the Holocaust alive. Keep writing about it, keep talking about it. And, if that means telling some stories from different perspectives, well, I think that's a good thing, I think, as long as you aim to do it respectfully and in an interesting way.

## **CHALLENGE**

Finally, Boyne has a message for young writers in today's woke world, in which what he calls "sensitivity readers" are ready to cancel anything remotely controversial. **John Boyne:** I don't want to be the [grumpy](#), middle-aged man criticising everybody all the time. But what I do worry about sometimes, when I read novels by people in their late twenties or early

thirties, is how safe they are and how they're sort of ticking all the boxes in each one and that then the work, to me, then seems [to lack](#) authenticity and it lacks a real sense of a writer's voice. You've got to want to write something that actually challenges in some way. I think a writer who goes through their entire career without causing any controversy, is maybe a bit boring. I do think younger writers should be a little more brave, perhaps, in their fiction and stop writing the same book over and over and, [cover versions](#) of each other's novels.

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# Glossary

- **halfway** = a metà strada
- **revolves around** = ruotare attorno
- **to lack** = mancare
- **to issue** = pubblicare
- **elder** = anziano
- **backlash** = reazione negativa
- **that's up to** = dipende da
- **ties up loose ends** = risolvere faccende in sospeso
- **wise** = saggio
- **countrymen** = compatrioti
- **cover versions** = versioni
- **awareness** = consapevolezza
- **aimed at** = diretto a
- **statement** = dichiarazione
- **strike up an unlikely friendship** = stringere amicizia
- **Striped** = a righe
- **required reading** = lettura obbligatoria
- **worth** = meritevole
- **grumpy** = scontroso
- **issues** = questioni
- **guilt** = colpa