

-Research Article-

“Cruelty and Goodness,” “Beauty and Terror”: Initiation and Moral Awakening in Taika Waititi’s *Jojo Rabbit*

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Abstract

Taika Waititi’s Jojo Rabbit (2019) portrays the initiation process of Jojo, a ten-year-old Nazi fanatic boy, whose mother hides a Jewish girl in the attic of their house, during the final stages of World War II. Befriended by an imaginary Adolf Hitler and being a member of the Hitler Youth camp, Jojo, in the beginning, is a proud child indoctrinated by the Nazi ideology. Then Jojo, through his interactions with his mother Rosie and the Jewish girl Elsa, changes, welcoming love instead of hate, further becoming aware of moral choices. Both Rosie’s peaceful worldview that embraces active goodness in the face of cruelty and Elsa’s educatory companionship guide Jojo in his initiation process, which finalizes in his emancipation from the Nazi ideology. The film portrays, on the one hand, institutional cruelty (not the cruelty in the battlefields and concentration camps), in which the young generation also learns to internalize the justification of cruelty, but also goodness represented by the courageous mother who dares to be a victim of cruelty to fight against it. Arguing that Jojo’s initiation is shaped by the conflict of cruelty and goodness, this study scrutinizes Jojo’s initiation through the philosopher Philip Hallie’s ethical lens, in which he reexamines cruelty with its multilayered aspect, analyzing institutional cruelty and ways of goodness that would serve as an attitude to cruelty.

Key Words: *Jojo Rabbit, Taika Waititi, Initiation, Cruelty, Goodness*

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DOI: 10.31122/sine ilozo i.1757950

Deniz, C. D., & Ersöz Koç, E. (2025). “Cruelty and Goodness,” “Beauty and Terror”: Initiation and Moral Awakening in Taika Waititi’s *Jojo Rabbit*. *Sinefilozofi Dergisi*, (2025 10. Yıl Özel Sayısı), 177-190. <https://doi.org/10.31122/sinefilozofi.1757950>

Received: 04.08.2025

Accepted: 20.10.2025



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-Araştırma Makalesi-

**“Zulüm ve İyilik,” “Güzellik ve Dehşet”: Taika Waititi’nin
Jojo Rabbit’inde Erginlenme ve Ahlaki Uyanış**

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Özet

Taika Waititi’nin *Jojo Rabbit* (Tavşan Jojo, 2019) isimli eseri, İkinci Dünya Savaşı’nın son demlerinde annesi tavan arasında Yahudi bir kız saklayan 10 yaşında fanatik bir Nazi genci Jojo’nun erginlenme sürecini anlatmaktadır. Başlarda hayali bir Adolf Hitler ile arkadaşlık kuran ve Hitler Gençlik Kampının bir üyesi olan Jojo, Nazi ideolojisi ile beyni yıkanmış bir çocuktur. Sonrasında annesi Rosie ve Yahudi kız Elsa ile yaşadığı olaylar sonucunda Jojo birtakım değişiklikler yaşamakta, nefret yerine sevgiyi kucaklamakta ve ayrıca ahlaki seçimlerinin farkına varmaktadır. Hem Rosie’nin zulme karşı aktif iyiliği benimseyen barışçıl dünya görüşü hem de Elsa’nın eğitimci refakati Jojo’ya erginlenme sürecinde rehberlik etmektedir. Bu süreç ise Jojo’nun Nazi ideolojisinden kurtulması ile sonlanmaktadır. Bir yandan filmde (savaş alanlarındaki veya toplama kamplarındaki zulüm yerine) genç nesle zulmü benimsemeyi öğreten kurumsal zulüm gösterilirken öte yandan bu zulme karşı savaşmak uğruna kurban olmayı göze alan cesur bir annenin iyiliği de resmedilmektedir. Jojo’nun erginlenme sürecinin zulüm ve iyiliğin çatışmasıyla şekillendiğini öne süren bu çalışma, bu süreci filozof Philip Hallie’nin zulmü çok katmanlı yönleriyle tekrar inceleyen ve kurumsal zulüm ile zulme karşı bir duruş olarak kabul edilebilecek iyilik yöntemlerini analiz eden etik bakış açısından irdelemektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Tavşan Jojo, Taika Waititi, Erginlenme, Zulüm, İyilik

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DOI: 10.31122/sinefilozofi.1757950

Deniz, C. D., & Ersöz Koç, E. (2025). “Cruelty and Goodness,” “Beauty and Terror”: Initiation and Moral Awakening in Taika Waititi’s *Jojo Rabbit*. *Sinefilozofi Dergisi*, (2025 10. Yıl Özel Sayısı), 177-190. <https://doi.org/10.31122/sinefilozofi.1757950>

Geliş Tarihi: 04.08.2025

Kabul Tarihi: 20.10.2025



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Introduction

Winner of the Academy Award for Best Adapted Screenplay, Taika Waititi's *Jojo Rabbit* (2019) is an exceptional dark comedy film that depicts how ten-year-old Jojo (Johannes Betzler) goes through an initiation, witnessing the cruelties of Nazi ideology. Illustrating how the Nazi ideology in the final stages of World War II indoctrinates a child's mind by depriving him of a proper childhood, the film projects the cruelty of war, not specifically in the battlefields or concentration camps, but in the everyday life, the individual conscience, and the imagination of a child. While the film is an adaptation of Christine Leunens' novel *Caging Skies* (2004), it deviates from the novel's dark tone by adopting a mood that blends drama with comedy. The film's humorous tone derives from Waititi's use of child gaze to reveal the diffusion of war and the distorted Nazi ideology into the sphere of ordinary life. The film portrays Jojo's initiation process, at the beginning of which Jojo willingly grasps and welcomes the Nazi cruelty. On the one hand, his dialogues with his imaginary friend Adolf Hitler and his experiences in Hitlerjugend exhibit how deeply he is indoctrinated by the dominant ideology of the era. On the other hand, his interactions with his mother and the Jewish girl (Elsa) that his mother secretly hosts in their attic present his initiation process of questioning the cruelty he has internalized in the atmosphere of intense Nazi propaganda. There are various academic approaches to the film; for example, Maria Sanchez Souto (2024), Angela Kalloli (2022), and Sanra Reji and Aparna Nandha (2022) explore the child gaze, whereas Joseph Scully adopts a psychoanalytic attitude, or William Skiles (2024) and Cailee Davis (2024) conduct ideological analysis employing different contextual frameworks. This study intends to analyze *Jojo Rabbit* through the philosopher Philip Hallie's ethical lens. How Jojo experiences and processes the cruelty and goodness around him towards the end of World War II is better understood through Hallie's ethical inquiry into the concepts of cruelty, evil, and goodness that he analyzes in his article "From Cruelty to Goodness." Throughout his work, Hallie defines cruelty and its multifaceted structure, the uncomplicated nature of goodness, and hospitality as an antidote to cruelty. While Jojo's indoctrinated state in the beginning reveals the systematic structures that prevent individual awareness of cruelty, his subsequent initiation through his mother's guidance and teachings and Elsa's companionship is a well-sustained radical example of active goodness of hospitality as the antidote to cruelty.

Philip Hallie's Concepts of Cruelty and Goodness

Cruelty is one of the most debated concepts in the history of philosophy, as it is a multilayered phenomenon that spans both individual intentions and social structures. In moral philosophy, cruelty is not only explained as the dark side of human nature, but also as the absence of justice or the corruption of institutional functioning. In this context, the Holocaust stands out as a historical event that makes the philosophical dimension of cruelty visible at its most extreme. At this point, rather than being mere sudden outbursts, cruelty becomes a phenomenon that is institutionalized through rational planning, bureaucratic order, and technical efficiency. One of the most remarkable conundrums of the Holocaust is how such a large-scale cruelty persisted not only through ideological fanaticism but also by penetrating the fabric of social life, institutional functioning, and bureaucratic order. In *Modernity and Holocaust*, Zygmunt Bauman emphasizes the execution of the Holocaust as a regular administrative process within the rational bureaucratic structures of modern society. For him,

Bureaucracy is intrinsically capable of genocidal action. To engage in such an action, it needs an encounter with another invention of modernity: a bold design of a better, more reasonable and rational social order - say a racially uniform, or a classless society - and above all the capacity of drawing such designs and determination to make them efficacious. Genocide follows when two common and abundant inventions of modern times meet. It is only their meeting which has been, thus far, uncommon and rare. (Bauman, 1989, p. 106)

Thus, the Holocaust should be understood as “a central event of modern history and not as an exceptional episode that represented a historical regression to barbarism” (Postone, 1992, p. 1521). Littell explains that “The credibility crisis of the modern university arises from the fact that the death camps were not planned and built, and their operational scheme devised by illiterates, by ignorant and unschooled savages. The killing centres were, like their inventors, products of what had been for generations one of the best university systems in the World...” (Littell, 1980, p. 7). That is, it is not the savages but the graduates of modern educational systems of the West who built and used the gas chambers to burn millions of innocents.

While enabling cruelty through bureaucratic order is one problem, as it contributes to the persistence of it, the normalization of the cruelty through not questioning it is another major predicament. In *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on The Banality of Evil*, Hanna Arendt explains that individuals, although they do not have evil intentions, can become partners in the greatest crimes of history if they act without thinking, with the habit of fulfilling their duties, such as in the example of Adolf Eichmann, whose actions reveal the banality of evil. According to Arendt, “The trouble with Eichmann was precisely that so many were like him, and that the many were neither perverted nor sadistic, that they were, and still are, terribly and terrifyingly normal. From the viewpoint of our legal institutions and of our moral standards of judgment, this normality was much more terrifying than all the atrocities put together” (Arendt, 2006, p. 276). This statement concretely clarifies Arendt’s concept of the banality of evil, offering a rudimentary glance into the internalization of the Nazi ideology through the routines of daily life. Both Bauman’s analysis of the Holocaust in relation to modernity and Arendt’s ideas on Eichmann as an example of banality of evil offer an insightful rethinking of the ways that enable the persistence of violence in the Holocaust years.

In addition to Bauman and Arendt, Philip Hallie is another philosopher who reflects on the nature and operation of cruelty. In “From Cruelty to Goodness” (1981), adapted from a presentation to Hastings Center’s Research Group on Death, Suffering and Well-Being, Philip Hallie concentrates on cruelty, the power dynamics inherent in it, and its contrast, goodness. Introducing himself as a “student” of ethics, of good and evil (the word “student” emphasizing that ethics is a field that requires constant questioning), Hallie adopts a skeptical approach to the concepts of cruelty and goodness. While examining the true nature of cruelty and goodness throughout his work, he tries to unravel their genuine meanings as exact opposites. Studying these concepts, he dwells upon the negative ethics, which mostly emphasize that to acquire goodness, one should refrain from committing evil and obey certain prohibitions that mostly forbid cruelty (Hallie, 1981, p. 23). However, he regards this approach as shallow because of its passivity in action. Avoiding cruelty and defying cruelty are totally different actions; while the former is passive in action, the latter requires active effort (Hallie, 1981, p. 23). Thus, avoiding cruelty only enables a neutral position, whereas defying it facilitates a good stance. As neutrality arises from the absence of goodness and cruelty, both of them necessitate an action. However, they differ from each other in their structures; even the minor responses to evil may embody a form of goodness, while cruelty has a more multifaceted structure.

Hallie begins his analysis of cruelty by digging into its etymological background. The word cruelty comes from the Latin word “crudus”, which is related to the word bloodshed. In other words, it involves the act of “shedding blood.” Modern dictionaries define it as “disposed to give pain” (Hallie, 1981, p. 23). This definition emphasizes awareness rather than the gory consequences of the act. Yet, according to Hallie, the word pain is only one of the words that describe cruelty because it is not limited to physical pain or direct forms of violence. To exemplify his conceptualization of cruelty, Hallie appeals to one of the darkest eras of human history, World War II, especially when the twisted Nazi ideology wreaked havoc all around Europe. For him, the physical torture is only one dimension of the cruelty that the Jewish people had to experience because to maim one’s dignity, to make them feel less human, there

is no need to shed blood or inflict pain. For example, the inmates of Nazi extermination camps were exposed to an infinite number of cruelties that did not induce localizable pain, such as “the process of keeping camp inmates from wiping themselves or from going to the latrine, and ... making them drink water from a toilet bowl full of excreta” (Hallie, 1981, p. 23). The psychological scar they suffered was more persistent than the physical one. He explains,

We human beings believe in hierarchies, whether we are skeptics or not about human value. There is a hierarchical gap between shit and me. We are even above using the word. We are “above” walking around besmirched with feces. Our dignity, whatever the origins of that dignity may be, does not permit it. In order to be able to want to live, in order to be able to walk erect, we must respect ourselves as beings “higher” than our feces. When we feel that we are not “higher” than dirt or filth, then our lives are maimed at the very center, in the very depths, not merely in some localizable portion of our bodies. And when our lives are so maimed we become things, slaves, instruments. (Hallie, 1981, p. 24)

Thus, although the heavy humiliation they faced did not physically harm them, in fact, it scarred them psychologically even deeper.

For Hallie, the most pervasive kind of cruelty is institutionalized cruelty because it operates through institutional and systemic structures. In order to elaborate on the power dynamics between the victimizer and victim, Hallie concentrates mostly on “the institutional cruelty of slavery and of Nazi anti-Semitism,” quoting from Reska Weiss’s *Journey through Hell* and Frederick Douglass’s *Life and Times*. Hence, institutional cruelty is harder to detect since in patterns of repetitive humiliation that persist for years in a community, both the victim and the victimizer find ways to obscure the harm done (Hallie, 1981, p. 24). While the victim may accept their inferiority and such acceptance justifies the way they are being treated, the accepted superiority in the mind of the victimizer makes them feel they deserve to do what they desire to those inferior creatures. For him, unbalanced power relationships provide for the persistence of institutionalized cruelty. The power here is not only economic or political. Language is one of the most powerful ideological weapons, and in the tongue of the victimizer, it can totally maim the self-respect of the victim. If the power differential is so crucial to the idea of cruelty, then the elimination of it can solve the problem of cruelty. Thus, freedom from the unbalanced power relationship may be an escape route from cruelty, and that means the antonym of cruelty is not kindness because a kind victimizer does not restore the victim’s mental and physical well-being (Hallie, 1981, p. 25).

In the subsequent part of his work, Hallie contemplates freedom as an escape route from the cruelty. He asserts that if cruelty is associated with evil, its exact opposite should be related to goodness, but the word escape carries negative connotations. Therefore, it cannot be the exact opposite of cruelty. Rethinking his earlier study, *The Paradox of Cruelty*, and “hoping for a hint of goodness in the very center of evil” (Hallie, 1981, p. 25), he finds his ultimate answer in a brief article about a French village, Le Chambon, where “a population of about 3,500, saved the lives of about 6,000 people, most of them Jewish children whose parents had been murdered in the killing camps of central Europe” (Hallie, 1981, p. 26). The residents of this small village sheltered them at the stake of their own lives. They shared their food and homes to provide for those people, although they did not have much for themselves. Their hospitality not only improved those people’s physical conditions, but also reminded them that they are human since they acknowledged them as individuals. Thus, he comes to the conclusion that liberation from the unbalanced power relationship is not the exact opposite of cruelty; true goodness is embodied in the hospitality of the villagers who actively oppose the evil.

Institutionalized Cruelty in *Jojo Rabbit*

Across time, the silver screen has been one of the primary instruments of securing the Holocaust’s place in the collective memory and shaping the historical consciousness (Baron,

2010, p. 444). While the power of visual narratives not only provides for illustrating the appalling experience of the Holocaust, it also enables the emotional, symbolic, and cultural dimensions of this experience to be conveyed by a wide audience, which contributes to the formation of a collective visual memory of the Holocaust. Taika Waititi's *Jojo Rabbit* is a sophisticated Holocaust film that blends humor and drama to unravel the cruelties of the Nazi era, the absurdity of oppressive Nazi ideas, and the subtle ways in which these ideas penetrate society. The film differs from other successful examples of the Holocaust genre, such as *Schindler's List* (1993), *The Pianist* (2002), and *Downfall* (2004) in terms of its visual and aesthetic characteristics, comic tone, and characterization of the protagonist. The works within this genre, in which the overall mood is pervaded by a sense of gravity, frequently employ a cool color palette to reinforce the dismal mood of the Nazi Era (Pakhi, 2024, p. 4) and usually present a weak Jewish victim who suffers from the Nazi cruelty (Davis, 2024, p. 11). Subverting these conventional characteristics, *Jojo Rabbit* sustains its humorous tone through caricature-like characters and their absurd traits. Rather than displaying the gloomy, violent mood of the era, Waititi uses a vibrant color palette to emphasize the fact that for many, life went on its ordinary patterns despite the surrounding violence, and more importantly, to underline the fact that the film progresses through a child's gaze. Concerning the protagonist, the film radically sets itself apart from the previously mentioned examples through its depiction of a young Nazi fanatic boy whose childlike perspective not only reinforces the film's comic tone but also filters the intricate historical realities through innocence (Skiles, 2024, p. 293).

Adapted from *Caging Skies* (2005) by Christine Leunens, *Jojo Rabbit* portrays the journey of a "10-year-old boy [Jojo] who over the years that follow grows from a nervous recruit in the Hitler Youth, into a man" (Kalloli & Tyagi, 2022, p. 193). Growing up in an atmosphere of intense Nazi propaganda, Jojo has gained a sympathetic view toward Hitler and his ideology, and he adopts Adolf Hitler as his imaginary friend, who actually personifies his indoctrinated state by the Nazi ideology. The film and the book diverge generically. The former is a comedy, whereas the latter is a drama; "While 'Caging Skies' presented a dark, solemn narrative about Nazi history and ideology, 'Jojo Rabbit' took a comedic approach, satirizing the Nazis' obsession with world domination and racial superiority" (Oktavia & Aris, 2024, p.31). Jojo's dialogues with Adolf reinforce the film's comic tone as "Waititi has strongly defended the idea of mocking Hitler through the naïve perspective of Jojo" (Sánchez Souto, 2024, p. 195). Although one can think that this humorous attitude undermines the cruelties of Hitler's wicked ideology, in her interview with Schargel, Leunens explains that Waititi wants to have a wide reach by using comical aspects because a dead serious attitude may prevent the younger generation from engaging with the film (Schargel, 2022, p. 570). The choice of such personification reveals how "institutionalized cruelty" is internalized in the mind of a young child and how systemic structures shape his ideas as he is "educated by Nazi society to imagine Hitler, the Nazis, and the 'Aryans' as his friends and the Jews as his diabolical foes" (Skiles, 2024, p. 286). Indicating the subtle existence of institutionalized cruelty, Waititi's use of Jojo's child gaze shows how it persists in a society for years; "[Jojo's] innocence can also be considered a metaphor for [his] ignorance, and the same ignorance most Germans gave as the reason for their inaction" (Kalloli & Tyagi, 2022, p. 196) since the Nazi ideology did not diffuse in the country overnight. Thus, the film adeptly conveys the process of ideological indoctrination, which specific systemic structures subtly maintain, through Jojo's personal experiences.

One of the important aspects that contributes to the indoctrinated state of Jojo is the Hitlerjugend youth camp, where the little children are subjected to a series of training, both verbal and physical, including highly dangerous and cruel acts such as burning books, using knives, and even throwing hand grenades. Despite his exceptional marksmanship, Captain K is reassigned to train young children in this youth camp due to a war injury that resulted in the loss of one of his eyes. In his introductory speech, Captain K explains the camp's purpose; he says, "Over the next two days you little critters will get to experience some of the things

that the mighty German Army goes through every day. And even though it would appear our country's on the back foot and that there really isn't much hope for us of winning this war, apparently we're doing just fine" (Waititi, 2019a, 00:05:32-00:05:47). Thus, the organization operates as a mechanism of manipulation that aims to integrate individuals into the ideology of the system at a young age. As he thinks he is demoted to a duty way below his skills, he does not regard this duty as particularly important. Thus, on the one hand, his ironic tone demonstrates his dissatisfaction with his displacement from the German army. On the other hand, the humorous subtext, which reveals the course of events does not unfold as he describes, shows how Nazi rhetoric misled and manipulated the public. Therefore, he is actually engaged in a mission of substantial strategic relevance.

The same manipulative rhetoric can be observed in one of the theoretical lectures of Fraulein Rone, who is another public officer of the Hitlerjugend organization. While educating the children about Jewish identity, the information that she provides for them is actually Nazi constructed myths. For instance, she says, "Yes scales, because once upon a time, a Jewish man mated with a fish, we Aryans are 1000 times more advanced and civilised than any other race" (Waititi, 2019a, 00:07:40-00:07:50). Jojo, along with the other children, is not surprised by this information, as it aligns with what he has already heard about Jews in his society. The deceptive and dreadful Jew image that is implanted in the minds of young children illuminates the epistemic aspect of institutionalized oppression, which is not just physical, but also cognitive. It distorts the perception of reality. Hallie emphasizes the fact that the cruelties of war are not restricted to the mass exterminations on the battlefields; also, language can be a dangerous ideological weapon. The fabricated Jew stereotype is intended to frighten the children and prevent them from bonding and empathizing with the Jews. According to Hallie, "the depths of an understanding of cruelty lie in the depths of an understanding of human dignity and of how you can maim it without bloodshed, and often without localizable bodily pain" (Hallie, 1981, p. 24). Thus, the film depicts how the language through which a humiliating stereotype of the enemy is maintained is a powerful vessel of institutional cruelty.

Although Jojo comes from the superior Aryan race, he experiences the same dignity abuse when the senior members of the youth camp bully him. They ask him to kill a rabbit to prove his courage. When he hesitates, one of the older boys, Hans, tells him that his father fled the war and joined the resistance, and that he is a coward just like his father. At this point, all the children make derogatory statements that shatter his shield of bravado and brand him as Jojo the rabbit, which explains the title of the film. (Reji & Nandha, 2022, p. 13). In the moments marked by discouragement, fear, and indecision, just like this one, his imaginary friend Adolf appears to provide counsel and support. Just as Jojo's imaginary friend Adolf represents a supportive fatherly figure in the absence of his own father (Reji & Nandha, 2022, p. 12), Hitler embodied a reassuring and empowering presence for the German society amid the profound struggles of World War II. However, the film effectively exposes how Hitler used people's need for a heroic figure by depicting him as a morally imbecile, egocentric character. For example, he repeatedly offers cigarettes to a ten-year-old, and he suggests burning down the house and framing Winston Churchill when they discover a Jew is hiding there (Skiles, 2024, p. 304). Thus, he supports Jojo only to make him keep his Nazi fanaticism. While his advice seems compassionate at first glance, his inappropriate behaviors reveal his moral blindness.

It is Adolf, again, who comforts Jojo when the other boys call him a rabbit. Adolf convinces him that there is nothing wrong with being a rabbit as "the rabbit is no coward. The humble little bunny faces a dangerous world everyday, hunting carrots for his family... for his country" (Waititi, 2019a, 00:12:52-00:13:00). As Adolf's consolation encourages Jojo, he decides to be the humble bunny to restore his sense of dignity. While Captain K teaches grenade deployment to the other kids, he takes the grenade from Captain K and throws it. However, it hits a tree and lands on Jojo's feet, and he gets severely injured. When his friend Yorkie sees him in this state,

he faints from fear. Just like Yorkie, overwhelmed by disgust and anxiety, Adolf also passes out. What makes this moment significant is that it happens after Jojo feels humiliation, although he lives in a cruel world that constantly humiliates, tortures, and kills the Jews, whom they deem inferior. Adolf's reaction to this situation, in the same way as a ten-year-old child, symbolizes the first serious crack in Jojo's relationship with Nazi ideology. The exploding grenade is not just a physical event, but the first explosion of Jojo's subconscious ideological security. The imaginary Adolf Hitler character in Jojo's mind is the personification of his devotion to Nazi ideology from the beginning. However, the fact that Adolf faints also shows that the "Hitler figure" in his imagination has weakened for the first time. This is a sign that Jojo's internalized cruelty is beginning to dissolve.

The grenade accident leaves damage on Jojo's face, arm, and leg. His physical condition upsets him because he is no longer eligible to attend either the training camps of Hitlerjugend or the German army, as he knows that Captain K is excluded from the army due to his injury. However, Hitlerjugend's activities are not restricted to those physical trainings; it also organizes the young children to carry out basic tasks such as collecting donations for the army or hanging propaganda posters and public announcements around the town, and Captain K assigns him to the poster duty. Through this designation, he becomes a vessel of institutionalized cruelty because posters and handouts are the crucial instruments that decrease the awareness of cruelty, since the constant presence of such materials in everyday life facilitates the normalization of the cruel ideology they promote. To show the institutionalization of cruel Nazi ideology, the film not only uses those propaganda materials but also gives a panorama of the city; depicted in vibrant colors, life goes on in its regular pace in the streets. Nobody even stops to take a look at the hanging corpses on the gallows except for Jojo's mother, Rosie.

The film, in essence, exhibits Jojo's indoctrinated state through his dialogues with his imaginary friend Adolf, who is also a projection of his inner world, through the subtle strategic maneuvers of the dominant ideology, and through the unintentional perpetuation of these maneuvers by individuals who remain silent in the face of the cruelty surrounding them. Still, a minority within Jojo's social context deliberately and actively resists the perverted ideological distortion, although he is unaware of them at first. His mother, Rosie, is actually one of them. Her teachings and guidance, and the Jewish girl she hides in their attic, contribute to Jojo's initiation.



Figure 1: *The poster (Waititi, 2019b, Cover Page)*

The poster of the film displays all the characters, who have either a positive or a negative impact on Jojo's indoctrinated state. As "an anti-hate satire," the film subsequently depicts how Jojo's internalization of cruelty begins to be dissolved through humorous dialogues with these characters, ultimately culminating in a form of complete emancipation. And the small detail that Adolf gestures bunny ears behind Jojo's head echoes the title and comic tone of the film. The poster depicts the protagonist Jojo at the center, surrounded by not only the people who serve the institutional cruelty, such as Hitler, Gestapo, Captain K, the soldier Finkel, and Fraulein Rone, but also his mother Rosie, who appears as the emblem of goodness, and Elsa. All those people contribute to Jojo's initiation, in which Jojo initially internalizes and then questions institutional cruelty.

Jojo's Moral Awakening

Rosie emerges as a single parent who resists the oppressive Nazi ideology not through violence, but through compassion and moral conviction. Despite the challenges of raising a kid alone, she tries to provide a life full of love for Jojo. Rosie is well aware of Jojo's indoctrinated state, but she does not try to awaken him by shattering his false visions about the ideology. Instead, she guides him to question his Nazi shaped perspective through which he comprehends the outside world. Trying to teach him the importance of love, empathy, and independent thinking, she helps him to overcome his learned hate toward the people he categorizes as the other. Her actions, such as hiding Elsa in their attic or distributing anti-fascist handouts, mirror her courageous resistance in the guise of an ordinary citizen. Therefore, she takes an active stance against the Nazi cruelty instead of just displaying passive avoidance. Rosie's strength does not come from mere rebellion, but from her worldview that emphasizes love and dignity over hate and power. Thus, she serves as the moral compass of Jojo in his initiation in a society that is consumed by a hateful and cruel ideology.

Rosie's anti-fascist attitude comes to light in several scenes. For example, when Jojo asks what the people on the gallows did, she answers, "what they could" (Waititi, 2019a, 00:20:29-00:20:30); or when she explains that she is happy because "Things are changing. The Allies have taken Italy. France will be next and the war will soon be over" (Waititi, 2019a, 00:39:57-00:40:03). Just as it is challenging for Rosie to help Jojo overcome his indoctrinated state, the process of finding out his mother's anti-fascist attitude is equally difficult for Jojo. While Jojo rejects her authority and thinks that she does not understand him, Rosie patiently keeps being there for him. The educatory relationship between them is symbolized through Rosie's act of teaching Jojo how to tie his shoelaces. The scene on the stone steps emphasizes the effects of Rosie's guidance on Jojo. In this scene, Rosie talks about the humane aspects of life, such as love, which she describes as a feeling of butterflies fluttering in one's stomach. This butterfly metaphor reappears later in the film to show Jojo's initiation.



Figure 2: *The scene on the stone steps* (Waititi, 2019a, 00:49:59)

However, Rosie is not the only person who contributes to Jojo's initiation. The Jewish girl Elsa, whom his mother helps, plays an important role in his process of breaking free from Nazi indoctrination. Jojo's world is turned upside down when he meets Elsa, who is a victim of institutionalized cruelty. Although she has lost her entire family and is in need of refuge, she is not characterized solely by her victim identity. Yes, Elsa is a subject open to hospitality, which Hallie defines as the ultimate antidote to cruelty, as her life depends on that, but she constantly defies the Jewish stereotype constructed by the Nazis to degrade Jews. Jojo's attitude towards Elsa is initially influenced by manipulations of institutionalized cruelty. For example, after his first encounter with her, when he notices that his mother sets aside some food for Elsa at dinner, he says that he is hungry and wants to eat her share too. Further, in one of their quarrels, he says, "But you're not. Not a proper person . . . How dare you, Jew. You are weak like... an eyelash. I am born of Aryan ancestry. My blood is the color of a pure red rose and my eyes are blue" (Waititi, 2019a, 00:38:30-00:38:49). This line emphasizes the fact that Nazi propaganda has done a great job in corrupting his mindset.

Disturbed by Elsa's presence, Jojo asks Captain K for guidance about what he should do if he sees a Jew. He answers, "If you see a Jew, then we tell the Gestapo, and they tell the SS, and then they go and kill the Jew. And anyone who helped the Jew. And, because these are very paranoid times, probably some other people, just in case. It's a pretty drawn-out process" (Waititi, 2019a, 00:35:12-00:35:27). Despite being an official figure of the Nazi army, Captain K questions the hollow, distorted structure of the system. Although his answer seems like a military protocol from the outside, it is actually completely sarcastic and criticizes the paranoid and violent structure of the Nazi regime. Hallie's definition of institutionalized cruelty comes into full form at this point. The functioning of the system has degenerated to such an extent that preventive violence is enforced with the paranoia that "something might happen". This is actually one of the basic implementation methods of Hitler's Nazi policy.

The dehumanization that Elsa feels is revealed in her dialogue with Rosie in the scenario. She says, "I haven't lived at all. And if this is living, this hole in the wall and all this darkness, then what will death be like?" (Waititi, 2019b, p. 33)¹. She lives like a dead person buried behind walls. Further, Rosie is a concrete representation of the concept of "active goodness" because she recognizes Elsa's existence and dignity like the villagers in Le Chambon in *From Cruelty to Goodness*. Hallie refers to those villagers' hospitality as the exact opposite of cruelty because the liberation from the cruel relationship; "[is] not even the end of it, because the victims would never forget and would remain in agony as long as they remembered their humiliation and suffering" (Hallie, 1981, p. 26). Despite the totalitarian oppression of the Nazi regime and deterrent practices such as execution, Rosie actively helps Elsa by hiding her in her house. This action is not only a help but also an acceptance of the humanity of a being who has been systematically excluded and made an enemy. Like his mother, Jojo will accept Elsa; he just needs to see that the definitions imposed by the dominant ideology are fake. This is also shown by the interviews he conducts with Elsa to get information about Jews while writing his book *Yoo-hoo Jew*. In those interviews, "Jojo confronts her with the Nazi prejudices against the Jews, asserting primitive pagan projections such as Jews having horns or being able to read minds" (Scully, 2021, p. 155). One of the key scenes in this context is where Jojo asks Elsa to draw where Jews live. Elsa hands him a "stupid" picture of his head and says, "Yeah, that's where we live," indicating the false attributions of Nazi ideology (Waititi, 2019a, 00:46:19-00:46:20). The questions Jojo asks Elsa about the absurd and mythological assumptions about Jews show his breaking away from his Nazi constructed reality.

¹ . In the film, Elsa says, "I haven't lived at all" (Waititi, 2019a, 00:32:59-00:33:00). In the scenario, Elsa's line is longer, and the next sentence holds significance. That's why the quotation in the paragraph is not from the film but from the scenario.

As Jojo continues his conversations with Elsa for *Yoo-hoo Jew*, his thoughts about her change because Elsa is nothing like the Jewish image that he has been taught about; she is neither weak nor ignorant. In fact, she is a strong intellectual girl. Gradually, he falls in love with her and experiences the love as his mother explains to him: He feels the butterflies in her stomach.



Figure 3: *Butterflies* (Waititi, 2019a, 01:05:22)

This feeling shows that his mother's guidance succeeds in mending what the Nazi ideology has corrupted once. Progressing in his journey of getting to know Elsa, his relationship with his imaginary friend Adolf dissolves.

The most powerful force contributing to Jojo's initiation is evidently the most dramatic moment of the film, when Jojo sees his mother executed on the gallows. Following a blue butterfly that is "a symbol of consciousness and potential for transformation" (Scully, 2021, p. 156), Jojo sees her mother's shoes hanging from the gallows, crying and hugging her feet, and trying but failing to tie her shoelaces. The close-up that depicts this dramatic moment is followed by a long shot of Jojo watching the hanging people on the gallows. The dramatic moment is also highlighted by a change in the palette. The earlier vibrant color palette shifts into a cold one in the close shots of the corpses and in the crosscuts to houses whose windows are depicted as eyes watching the gallows.



Figure 4: *The Houses and The Gallows* (Waititi, 2019a, 01:18:4)



Figure 5: *House with eyes*
(Waititi, 2019a, 01:18:44)



Figure 6: *House with eyes II*
(Waititi, 2019a, 01:18:54)

While the cold, colored gallows mirror the gravity of Nazi cruelty, houses have a multilayered interpretation; they may reflect the tattletale spirit of the era, or perhaps they have faded due to the weight of the suffering and cruelty they have witnessed. This is exactly the social atmosphere in which Jojo's identity has been formed.

After Jojo sees his mother being executed, he no longer wants to be friends with Adolf. Initially loving and supportive, this imaginary friend gradually becomes authoritarian, aggressive, and violent. For example, when Jojo is humiliated by the children in the camp, Hitler encourages him by saying, "My empire will be made up of all animals, lions, giraffes, zebras, rhinoceroses, octopuses, rhine-octopuses and even the mighty rabbit" (Waititi, 2019a 00:13:02-00:13:14). However, when Jojo no longer wants to take part in his kingdom, Adolf bombards him with commands: "where the shit do you think you are going? Out? Oh no, you don't. Now we are gonna stay in here and you gonna tell me exactly what is going on with you and that thing in the attic" (Waititi, 2019a, 01:38:46-01:38:57). This transformation emphasizes Jojo's break from the cruel ideology that comes with awareness. Jojo finally says goodbye to the symbolic representation of cruelty in his mind by throwing the imaginary Adolf out the window.

At the end of the film, even though Germany loses the war, Jojo lies to Elsa and tells her that Germany wins, because he is afraid that Elsa will leave him alone. However, as the butterfly images placed all around his bedroom in the scene just before he kicks Adolf out the window suggest, he will do the right thing. Thus, fighting his fear, he frees Elsa, which indicates how Jojo's initiation is a process in which he learns to grasp his moral responsibilities as a human and his decision to make the right choices. Jojo's subsequent going out and dancing with Elsa shows that he has gained the courage to establish a new ethical worldview as an individual. As it is mentioned before, the shoelace metaphor serves to show Jojo's initiation. While he cannot tie his deceased mother's shoes, he succeeds in tying Elsa's (Ni & Wang, 2022, p. 1986). Thus, Jojo's initiation process, which has begun under his mother's guidance, continues with Elsa's companionship. Their contributions, together, bring this process to an end. Jojo is no longer a pawn of an ideology whose manipulations his child mind cannot comprehend. He acknowledges that Elsa is a fellow human being just like him, and she righteously deserves happiness and freedom in life. As an individual who is freed from Nazi oppression and manipulation, Jojo can now establish a new ethical ground. His dance is the messenger of this new ethical order: it heralds a break from the past and a hopeful look to the future, as dancing is an action through which his mother appreciates freedom and peace. He understands what it means to enjoy the moment and listen to his heart, as his mother advises him. This is also pointed out by the words that appear at the end of the film:

Let everything happen to you

Beauty and terror

Just keep going

No feeling is final.

-Rainer Maria Rilke (Waititi, 2019a, 01:43:01-01:43:13).

This poetic stanza emphasizes again Jojo's character development. Rilke suggests that one should experience all the opposites, such as beauty and terror, that happen to them because "Without the experience of the opposites there is no experience of wholeness" (Jung, 1968, p. 20). Of course, as a ten-year-old child, Jojo has a long journey ahead of him, but since he has experienced both cruelty and hospitality as its antidote, his initiation is now complete. Towards the end of his article, Hallie mentions a woman who was one of the audience members in one of his lectures and who said that Le Chambon was the village that saved all three of her children (Hallie, 1981, p. 28). The woman said that "The Holocaust was storm, lightning, thunder, wind, rain, yes. And Le Chambon was the rainbow" (Hallie, 1981, p. 28). Waititi's film portrays a child's initiation and moral awakening in the midst of cruelty and goodness, of rain and a rainbow.

Conclusion

Taika Waititi's *Jojo Rabbit* is an award-winning Holocaust film, which shows the Nazi cruelty and how it subtly normalizes itself in the everyday sphere of life, focusing on the experiences of a young Nazi fanatic boy. While the use of child gaze brings a comic tone to the film, it also underlines how dangerous this normalization through institutional and systemic structures can become. Growing up in an atmosphere of intense Nazi propaganda, Jojo adopts an anti-Semitic perspective. In the context of his subtle indoctrination by the manipulative strategies of Nazi ideology, Hallie's reexamination of the concepts of cruelty and hospitality offers an invaluable framework for analyzing *Jojo Rabbit*. In his article "From Cruelty to Goodness," Hallie argues that moral evil is not restricted to individual sadism or explicit violence. Rather, it insidiously operates as a form of systematic oppression that is sustained through social institutions and dominant ideologies. He refers to this kind of oppression as institutionalized cruelty and further explains that it actually aims to maim individual self-respect and human dignity. His reexamination of cruelty as a multilayered aspect that is not only associated with physical harm but also with a psychological dimension provides a critical lens for comprehending Jojo's indoctrinated state. Hallie also comes up with an antidote that can dissolve the negative effects that lurk in the deepest and secluded parts of the individual mind. For him, the ultimate solution is not freedom, indifference, or kindness, but hospitality, which he defines as a protective and healing attitude because it helps heal the psychological scars of cruelty by acknowledging the victim as an individual. Thus, Hallie's argument can be traced in Waititi's *Jojo Rabbit* from the beginning to the end. While the Hitler figure, who emerges as Jojo's imaginary friend, mirrors the indoctrination of the Nazi ideology in the little child's mind, his mother Rosie and the Jewish girl Elsa, whom Rosie hides in the attic, represent hospitality in the form of goodness. Jojo's transformation is highlighted by the parallel use of the shoelace and butterfly symbols that resonate across his relationship with Rosie and Elsa. Thus, Hallie's analysis of "institutionalized cruelty," "hospitality," and "moral resistance" provides a prolific lens for rethinking Jojo's moral initiation. The film, as "an anti-hate satire," portrays the initiation of a child experiencing "rain and rainbow," "beauty and terror," and "cruelty and goodness."

Conflict of Interest Statement

The author of the article declared that there is no conflict of interest.

The Researchers' Statement of Contribution Ratio Summary

The first author contributed 50% to the article, while the second author contributed 50% to the article

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