Fernando Zan Vieira

THE CHANGING ROLE OF NAZI CHARACTERS IN *SCHINDLER'S LIST*, *VALKYRIE* AND *THE READER*

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ABSTRACT

Cinematographic representations of Nazi Germany are, in general, focused on the crimes and atrocities committed by its followers, being the major ones those associated to the Holocaust. Recently, new cinematographic productions have also portraryed German characters during the Nazi period as saviors, resisters and even heroes. This problem is the starting point from this thesis: *Schindler's List* (1993) portrays a German industrialist who saved about 1,200 Jewish people from death; *Valkyrie* (2008) shows a German Army officer who conspired to kill Hitler; and *The Reader* (2008) has as its protagonist a Nazi agent whose participation in a Holocaust crime is somehow neutralized by a more human portrayal. These different portrayals of Nazi characters can be identified by an analysis of (1) the overall narratives of the films; and (2) by the constitutive elements of filmic image (such as editing, photography, lighting, sound, among other). These films will be compared to films in which Nazi characters are shown as the antagonists whose role as murderers and criminals is well known: *Sophie's Choice* (1982), *Escape From Sobibor* (1987) and *Saving Private Ryan* (1998). Postmodern theory is proper to contextualize and to explain these new representations, as its skepticism towards master narratives gives room for historical revisionism. Furthermore, such representations arise from a certain temporal distancing between the historical fact and the filmic production which portrays it. Microhistory, which recovers events related to specific characters who protagonize these historical events, such as the main characters of the films in analysis, also helps to contextualize the films'production. The dissertation also presents an analysis of the films' use of representation, stereotypes, melodrama, and the casting of stars in the roles of Nazi characters. The analysis of the films suggests the ethical limits of postmodern theory vis–à–vis the problems proposed by such representations.

Key–Words: Nazism. Postmodernism. Film. Holocaust.

RESUMO

As representações cinematográficas da Alemanha Nazista são, em geral, fundamentadas com base em crimes e atrocidades cometidos por seus seguidores, sendo os principais referentes ao Holocausto. No entanto, recentemente têm sido verificadas novas produções cinematográficas nas quais alguns personagens alemães durante o período Nazista são retratados como salvadores, resistentes e até mesmo heróis; há inclusive filmes nos quais perpetradores de crimes são retratados de forma diferente da usual. Esse problema é o ponto de partida desta tese: em *Schindler's List* (1993), há o personagem de um industrial alemão que salvou da morte cerca de 1,200 judeus; em *Valkyrie* (2008), há a história de um oficial do Exército que conspirou para matar Hitler; e em *The Reader* (2008), tem–se a personagem de uma agente nazista que participou de um crime relacionado ao Holocausto, mas que é retratada de forma muito diferente e humana, em relação à outros filmes mais antigos sobre o mesmo tema. Para demonstração dessas diferenças, sequências específicas dos três filmes acima são apresentadas com base nos elementos constitutivos da imagem fílmica (tais como montagem, fotografia, iluminação, som, dentre outros) e comparadas com sequências de outros três filmes anteriores, onde os personagens da Alemanha Nazista são mostrados da forma mais comum (como assassinos e criminosos): *Sophie's Choice* (1982), *Escape From Sobibor* (1987) e *Saving Private Ryan* (1998). A teoria Pós–Moderna é adequada para contextualizar e explicar as novas representações dos filmes mais recentes, visto que seu ceticismo em relação às grandes narrativas abre espaço para o revisionismo. Ademais, tais representações surgem a partir de um certo distanciamento temporal entre o fato histórico e a produção cinematográfica que o retrata. Outro fator, além do Pós–Modernismo e do distanciamento, é a microhistória, que busca resgatar eventos relacionados a personagens específicos que protagonizam esses acontecimentos históricos, tais como os personagens centrais dos filmes em análise. Ainda, são discutidos conceitos importantes para a linguagem cinematográfica, tais como representação, a construção de estereótipos, o melodrama e a presença de grandes estrelas nesses filmes, dentre outros. Discutem–se, ainda, os limites éticos da teoria Pós–Moderna e como eles estão relacionados com o problema proposto por tais representações.

Palavras–Chave: Nazismo. Pós–Modernismo. Filme. Holocausto.

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INTRODUCTION

The subject of Nazi Germany and the Holocaust has been a strong and powerful theme for the Hollywood cinema after World War II, with its portrayal of suffering, rescue, salvation and resistance of and by oppressed people against persecution and tyranny, usually underscoring the drama with the participation of the U. S. Armed Forces and their central role in fighting Nazism and restoring freedom. Nevertheless, in recent contemporary films, resistance to Nazism comes from the inside: Germans take the protagonist role, standing against Hitler's forces and resisting to Holocaust, or else, the films provide more complex and less stereotypical portrayals of Nazi agents. Regarding this recent trend about the representation of Nazism, it is useful to acknowledge the importance films have in shaping the views of their public, namely what Robert Burgoyne calls attention to as "the power of film to influence popular understanding" (22). So, it is important to analyze and understand the context in which these films emerge and the representation they offer.

This thesis presents an analysis of the ways in which recent Hollywood film productions have represented Nazism and the Holocaust; more specifically, in six Hollywood–produced films, whose plots involve Nazi characters, Nazism and the Holocaust. The study divides these films into two groups, according to the way the story and characters are represented. In the first, which includes *Sophie's Choice* (1982), *Escape from Sobibor* (1987) and *Saving Private Ryan* (1998) Nazis, and by extension, Germans of the period, are represented as evil, treacherous, cruel; the criminal responsibility for the Holocaust rests unequivocally upon German and Nazi shoulders; its agents are to be blamed. The second group of films contains *Schindler's List* (1993), *Valkyrie* (2008) and *The Reader* (2008). In these,

though Nazism is still a political system that must be vanquished, Nazi characters take on the status of heroes, resisters and even victims of that system: in their portrayal, they save Jewish Holocaust victims, they oppose the Holocaust as a State policy, they are sometimes persecuted and victimized by Nazis, and they represent some sort of general resistance to Nazi Germany and to the Holocaust. Representation in these films appears to present an account that add a couple of qualifying footnotes from most historical narratives of the Holocaust and German direction of and participation in it.

Given this approach to the historical record, postmodernism may be useful to understand how these films interpret history, as they depart from the more usual way to depict and understand the history of that period. This work's thesis posits that postmodern theory can help to explain and understand such films and the representation constructed by them. One possible explanation for such a change in representation could be associated with the historical distancing allowed after the 1990s, which can be one of the reasons for such different portrayals of the Nazi characters and German characters.

Functioning frequently as an ideological and political apparatus, Hollywood would tend to create filmic representations that promoted America's heroes and heroic actions, meanwhile denouncing America's enemies as actual enemies of the entire world. As pointed out by Robert Brent Toplin**,** regarding the United States Armed Forces in World War II, *Saving Private Ryan* is one among many films which "suggests in subtle ways that the Americans who risked their lives in that great enterprise are worthy of praise" (Toplin 116).

If the Americans were usually portrayed as heroes, Nazis were presented as villains, killers, treacherous, and involved in multiple atrocities against civilians, and responsible for the massacre of six million Jewish people that was known as the Holocaust. This is the portrayal and representation of Nazi characters that *Sophie's Choice*, *Escape from Sobibor* and *Saving Private Ryan* present. However, the other three films appear to tell stories that other accounts ignored: the rescue of Jewish victims by an industrial businessman in *Schindler's List*, the resistance of some members of the German military against Hitler in *Valkyrie*, and even a more humane portrayal of a Nazi female guard in *The Reader*, making the representation of Nazi

characters more complex. Although a Holocaust perpetrator, the character Hanna Schmitz, in the latter film is not represented the way Nazis typically were in American film. Instead of being portrayed as a simple, unidimensional evil villain, she is made to display feelings such as fear, love, care, suffering and anguish, to name a few, making her much more humane than previous representations of Nazi characters. In his analysis of the film, William Donahue suggests that "this more nuanced depiction of a perpetrator has been hailed as an advance over the simplistic, moralising approaches of the past, which tend to cast perpetrators and victims in monochromatic extremes" (Donahue 61).

Several films produced during the 50's, the 60's and the 70's portray American soldiers' heroism during World War II. A few films portrayed Nazis in a more complex way, including Sam Peckimpah's *Cross of Iron* (1977), which presents James Coburn as a disillusioned German sergeant fighting on the Russian Front. But the fact that the film portrays Coburn's unhappiness allows one to perceive the sergeant's inner struggle against the Nazi ideology. Nevertheless, the film was not without its more plain German evil character: in this case, the ambitious Captain Stransky, played by Maximillian Schell. Moreover, the film, which is set on the Eastern Front, was produced by an iconoclast, a somewhat marginal American director, whose films portray the "bad guys", as some sort of "hero material", such as the robbers in his very famous western *The Wild Bunch* (197).

In *Cross of Iron*, the Holocaust is never addressed, as Coburn's character hates war and is never seen involved in crimes of any kind. He is simply an apolitical German sergeant, trying to stay alive. The traumatic memory of Vietnam may have had some role on the genesis of this particular film. Other American films would present German characters in a more complex way. That is the case in films such as *The Young Lions* (1958), where Marlon Brando plays a heroic and sympathetic German officer, and *A Time to Love and a Time to Die* (1958), with John Gavin as an honorable German soldier fighting in Russia. These films do not address the Holocaust, as if the public should not be reminded of the Nazi atrocities against the Jews even though Germans were the film's protagonists. Such omission already implies a view of history that is at least contradictory. Or perhaps, could it be that at the time it was only through such omissions that it became possible to present more or

less sympathetic characters on the German side. Even more, these sympathetic Germans were presented fighting Russian Communists, not American soldiers.

Nevertheless, war or drama films with a sympathetic depiction of Nazis were the opposite to the rule. Most Hollywood films presented the Americans and the allies as the prime examples of heroism as they struggle for democracy. As Kathryn Kane suggests: "Americans are defined as the forces of good through their common attributes, which are contrasted with those of the enemy, in terms of duality." (88). She also states that "they are people of controlled and reasoned forcefulness, with a democratic yet hierarchic world order, led by knowledgeable, capable, and humane leaders. The enemy, in contrast, is a creature of chaos, uncontrolled violence, and immorality" (Kane 88). With these enemies are included Germans and their allies, the Japanese.

Several films before *Schindler's List* could be presented as examples, including those studied in the first group of this work, such as *The Bridge Over the River Kwai* (1957), *The Guns From Navarone* (1961), *The Longest Day* (1962), *The Great Escape* (1963), *The Battle of the Bulge* (1965), *The Battle of Britain* (1969), *Too Late the Hero* (1970), *Patton* (1970), and *Midway* (1976), to name just a few. Both drama and war films continue to present more simplistic plots in which the opposites (good characters and bad characters) are used to reinforce those roles without any attempt to display a more complex narrative. A few examples include: *U–571* (2000), *Enemy at the Gates* (2001), *Red Tails* (2012), and the miniseries *Band of Brothers* (2001) and *The Pacific* (2010). Holocaust–themed films where Jewish victims actively resist the Nazis are also frequent, such as *Uprising* (2001), *The Grey Zone* (2001), and *Defiance* (2008).

Few topics available to the film industry could be used more efficiently in depicting Nazi violence, crime and brutality than the systematic persecution and extermination of the European Jewry. The expression Holocaust is completely identified with the policies and actions of Nazi Germany, and any attempt to create a more subtle, even less stereotyped version of celluloid Nazis could easily be taken as an attempt to whitewash those actions and policies and their results, despite the memory of Nazi crimes against the Jewish people. The extermination acts carried out by Nazi Germany would also allow any Nazi

character in film to become the ideal villain type. At the same time, portraying Nazis as such (evil, villainous, murderous, cruel) would allow their heroic counterparts in any given film of the genre to be portrayed as everything but. As the heroes in the filmic narratives, American characters would present all the benefits of life in a Western democracy, with its spirit of sacrifice, heroism, bravery, intolerance for crime and any kind of abuse, for the persecution of evil and other qualities that would present the real meaning of America's political system.

Holocaust films, older or recent ones, usually depict Nazis as the criminal force behind the disaster that fell upon Jewish communities throughout Europe. These films present the arbitrary legal measures that disenfranchised the persecuted communities and ended with the physical extermination of several million people across Europe. Lucy Dawidowicz argues that 5,933,900 European Jewish people were killed during the Holocaust (403). Another figure is given by Wolfgang Benz, who estimates that the number of murdered Jews was a staggering total of 6,146,895 (145). Considering the Holocaust in a broader definition, it may include nearly three million Soviet P.O.W.s who died as the result of mistreatment, two million ethnic Poles who died due to the conditions of the Nazi occupation and other minorities such as "90,000–220,000 Romani, 270,000 mentally and physically disabled killed in Germany's eugenics program, 80,000–200,000 Freemasons, 20,000–25,000 Slovenes, 5,000–15,000 homosexuals, 2,500–5,000 Jehova's Witmesses and 7,000 Spanish Republicans" (Niewyk 45), thus " bringing the death toll to around 11 million. The broadest definition would include six million Soviet civilians who died as a result of war–related famine and disease, raising the death toll to 17 million" (45).

These numbers show how hard is to be subtle about all these murders. There were some decent Germans who opposed such horrors, and perhaps *Schindler* and *Valkyrie* favor the representation of their heroes not exactly by suppressing and omitting the Nazi actions (both films present a least a share of it), but by using these characters to oppose and criticize them. The central character in *The Reader* inverts the rule: she is not even a passably decent German, but her crime is altogether absent from the representation.

In both American and European films about the Holocaust, the narrative is generally presented as an extreme account of life

and death, where the Nazis are the antagonists and the Jewish or other persecuted people occupy the victim's role. Belonging to this particular form of representation are the first three films in this discussion: *Sophie's Choice* (1982), *Escape from Sobibor* (1987), and *Saving Private Ryan* (1998). This latter film, although not a Holocaust–themed one, also presents the German Nazis antagonists, and it contains some other references to the Holocaust.

In this context of film production, filmmaker Steven Spielberg produced *Schindler's List* (1993), a film about a German businessman and Nazi party member who sought to deceive the Nazis and save his Jewish workers from death. Schindler despises the Nazis and endangers himself to achieve the goal of saving his workers. Two 2008 films presented more unusual Nazi characters and were produced in Hollywood with two of its superstars in the main roles. *Valkyrie* stars Tom Cruise as German officer Stauffenberg conspiring to kill Hitler, end the war and close the concentration camps. The film recounts the July 20th, 1944 conspiracy to kill Hitler by using a bomb delivered by Stauffenberg, a character who denounces the regime and positions himself against the Holocaust. Cruise's superstar status can be seen as a function to help him to create a heroic and sympathetic character. In *The Reader*, another film in which German protagonists are being represented by popular stars, Kate Winslet stars as a Nazi agent whose trial is caused directly by her participation in the Holocaust atrocities committed against three hundred female Jewish workers, who were burned to death. Tried in Germany, Winslet's character affirms her innocence. Her love relation with a much younger German boy in the first part of the film induces the viewer to see her as a sympathetic character. Moreover, she is put on trial with other co–defendants that throw the blame for the crime solely upon her, creating something like the status of a scapegoat for her. Not that this would make her look better, but could make the others look even worse.

These new historical perspectives of the role played by Germans during the Holocaust and the atrocities of World War II embedded in these latter films can be understood from various perspectives: (1) the very construction of the films make use of a whole filmic apparatus and narrative form; (2) the distancing of these films from real historical events of World War II – a historical distancing inevitable by the 1990s when these latter

films were made; and (3) the postmodern theoretical arena, which has invited a reconsideration of history and a consideration of historical figures that had never been accounted for before. In our times, European films, some of them German, have attempted to create a more complex way of presenting and understanding the Nazi phenomenon as an ideological apparatus from which, at the time, Germans could hardly detach themselves. Films such as *Downfall* (2004), and *Sophie Scholl: The Final Days* (2005), focus on character development and the victimization of the German civilian populations. Still within this more recent perspective on the Holocaust and World War II, Roberto Benigni's *Life is Beautiful* (1998), an Oscar winning film, could be seen as comedic and ironic comment on the Holocaust, whereas Clint Eastwood's *Letters from Iwo Jima* (2006) foregrounds a less stereotyped version of the conflict by narrativizing the story through the eyes of the Japanese. *Schindler*, *Valkyrie* and *The Reader* may also be seen as presenting a much more humanized version of the Holocaust and of its German characters. In these three films, a few Nazi and German protagonists are being presented as resisters, heroes and even victims of the Nazi system. Considering the importance and impact of these films and the overall understanding of the Holocaust and World War II conveyed by them, this thesis's main objective is to analyze this phenomenon. The narratives that make up these films invite us to investigate their representations of these events, and the representations of the main characters caught in them, as compared with previous portrayals of the Germans in such as *Sophie's Choice*, *Escape From Sobibor*, and *Saving Private Ryan*.

Although these more recent representations do not appear to present the Nazi characters as representative of the majority of the German people during the Nazi period and are certainly not decontextualized from the horrors that are happening around them, they propose a shift in terms of representation, that is, a more differentiated portrayal of the Germans during the Nazi regime by showing that some Germans were not evil, cruel or villainous, but courageous, altruistic and heroic, and even when involved in Holocaust atrocities can be seen as victims of the brutality and banalization of evil propagated by the Nazi regime. These recent films seem to highlight humanity within German characters, suggesting a few new details of interpretation, but

without exonerating the Nazis for their crimes. For the purpose of analysis, I understand a Nazi as a character that, instead of simply being a member of a political party or a military force, adheres to the Nazi creed, including Anti–Semitism, and behaves in accordance to its standards.

FILM'S CORPUS

The first group of films to be analyzed present Nazi characters as evil and treacherous and individualy responsible for the atrocities of the Holocaust. All of them will be further explored in the following chapters.

In *Sophie's Choice* (Alan Pakula, 1982), the Nazi character that is the focus of analysis is a nameless Auschwitz German officer (Karlheinz Hackl). He appears only in the final section of the film, when the title character Sophie Zawitowska (Meryl Streep) is deported to the camp with her two children, a boy and a girl. Sophie is forced by the officer to choose which of her two children may survive and which one will be sent to the gas chambers. She is offered the choice for being Polish and not Jewish. In a very dramatic and tense scene, where this Nazi doctor is depicted as a ruthless character, he forces Sophie to choose one of the children.

The director Alan Pakula filmed the "choice" scene at Auschwitz in a set built in Yugoslavia, being denied the opportunity to shoot at the actual place by the Polish Government. He was helped by a survivor in order to be more realistic in the film's portrayal of the Nazi death camp: "he hired a survivor of Auschwitz to work with him and the actors in the Auschwitz scenes" (Brown 270). The characteristic of evil is present in the portrayal of the Nazis at Auschwitz. Pakula argued that the film aimed to represent the horrors of a death camp: "the camera just goes over the garden fence, it just goes right into the filth and the mud and the horror and the stench, that represents the banality of evil, the evil of the people who created the Holocaust" (271).

The "choice" scene was to be so brutal that Meryl Streep commented about the impact of the scene when she was given the script, that: "I read it once... and never read it again, because I couldn't stand it" (273). The Nazi doctor who strips her of one of the children can be seen as a sadistic and cruel character,

someone who appears in the scene only to perform that particular act, and does it in a very convincing manner. As Pakula stated, the fear on Jennifer Lawn's face (she was the four-year-old who portrays the child) "was obviously genuine; no child of her age could have acted so convincingly" (273). The whole scene, as it will be further explored in this dissertation, goes, "from the train's arrival at Auschwitz, through the doctor's insistence on Sophie's choosing which of her children shall live and who will die, to the silent scream – one of the most disturbing and powerful scenes ever recorded on film" (Brown 274).

    Escape from Sobibor (Jack Gold, 1987) presents an account of the historical day of October 14th, 1943, when there was a rebellion of Jewish prisoners in the Sobibor Death Camp. The camp's prisoners killed some SS guards and Ukrainian auxiliaries, and were able to break out to the nearby woods. The heroes of this narrative are Jewish prisoners: Leon Feldhendler (Alan Arkin), Red Army officer Sasha Perchesky (Rutger Hauer), and Stanislaw Schzmajner (Simon Gregor). Other Jewish characters are represented both as victims and as active resisters. The Nazi characters are all evil, cruel and they are deeply involved in atrocities and mass killings: commander Franz Karl Reichleitner (Eric Caspar), Lieutenant Johann Niemann (Henry Stolow), Sergeants Karl Frenzel and Erich Bauer (Kurt Raab and Klaus Grünberg), and the worst, deputy commander sergeant Gustav Wagner (Hartmut Becker). These Nazi characters' killing, beating, torturing and whipping of Jewish prisoners were rendered after Richard Rashke's book, who interviewed several survivors such as Thomas Blatt and Stanislaw Szmajner, and whose autobiographical books are also sources for the film.

    Saving Private Ryan (Steven Spielberg, 1998) is a Hollywood blockbuster, presenting the story of a squad of eight soldiers, commanded by Captain John Miller (Tom Hanks), searching for paratrooper James Ryan (Matt Damon) who was selected to be taken out from the front lines and sent home after his three brothers were killed in action. The film portrays the American soldiers as heroic, as they struggle to rescue Europe and the World from the Nazi State, whose soldiers appear just as the evil enemy that needs to be destroyed. No German soldier is portrayed in a redemptive or sympathetic light. One unnamed SS soldier is at first presented in such light, but later he reveals himself as being cowardly and treacherous. A scene where an SS

soldier kills a Jewish American soldier may be seen as representing the Holocaust as a whole, despite being presented in a different context, which is the war portion of the Nazi activities and not directly the systematic killing of targeted populations, such as the Jews. When asked why he would direct such a film, Spielberg said: "I think that World War II is the most significant event of the last 100 years; the fate of the baby-boomers and even Generation X was linked to the outcome. Beyond that, I've just always been interested in World War II" (Pizzello 146). The director also states that his "earliest films, which I made when I was about 14 years old, were combat pictures that were set both on the ground and in the air. For years now, I've been looking for the right World War II story to shoot, and when Robert Rodat wrote *Saving Private Ryan*, I found it" (146).

As previously stated, the second group of films to be analyzed in this dissertation foregrounds a more subtle and complex portrayal of Nazi characters, some of them historical ones and other fictionalized. Some Nazi characters central to the plot are seen resisting Nazi policies, and even when they are shown carrying out such policies, they are seen from a more complex perspective.

Schindler's List (Steven Spielberg, 1993) is the story of how a German businessman was able to deceive the Nazis and save 1,200 Jewish workers, who otherwise would have been killed in the Holocaust. Oskar Schindler (Liam Neeson) is the hero of the narrative, portrayed as a sympathetic, smart and noble character, whose charm and appeal are convincing enough to mislead Nazi agents. He is helped by the Jewish accountant Itzhak Stern (Ben Kingsley) and befriends several SS officers, portrayed as corrupt, despicable villains, the worst of them being concentration camp commander Amon Goeth (Ralph Fiennes). The film is a Hollywood blockbuster that intends to be a grand portrait of the Holocaust and does not pretend to defend Germans during the Holocaust, but it may have inaugurated a new reading of Germans during the Holocaust. The protagonist is German, acting against the Nazis involved in the Holocaust, opposing the perversion and cruelty of Goeth and the other Nazi characters.

The film's production is connected with Leopold Pfefferberg, a "Schindlerjude", as Schindler's protégés came to be called, who wanted to tell the story of his savior, and was drawn to the character of Schindler due to his "paradoxical

nature". Spielberg decided to direct the film when he noticed that Holocaust deniers were being given serious consideration by the media: "with the rise of Neo-Nazism after the fall of the Berlin Wall, he worried that people were too accepting of intolerance, as they were in the 1930s" (Crowe 603). Spielberg also directed the film by placing "more focus on the Jews in the story, and he wanted Schindler's transition to be gradual and ambiguous, not a sudden break or epiphany" (Thompson 02).

Valkyrie (Bryan Singer, 2008), concerns the 20th of July, 1944 Bomb Plot against Adolf Hitler. The film shows how a group of German army officers and politicians articulated a coup to kill Hitler, overthrow the Nazi regime, arrest several SS members and end the war. The main character is Colonel Klaus von Stauffenberg (Tom Cruise). Instead of only one German resister, the film presents a handful of them, who recognize Hitler, his Nazi followers, and his regime as a criminal system that is leading Germany and Europe to their ultimate destruction. They also denounce the Holocaust, the persecution of civilians and the murder of prisoners as criminal acts. These German characters detach themselves from the Nazi world and become resisters and heroes throughout the narrative.

The production of the film started in 2002, when screenwriter Christopher McQuarrie "visited Berlin while researching another project and visited the memorial to von Stauffenberg at the Benderblock. Researching the plot, he was moved and fascinated by the fact that the conspirators were fully aware of what would happen if they failed in their assassination attempt, and he wanted to make their story more well–known" (Dawson 09). Famous for major productions such as *X-Men* (2000), *X2* (2003) and *Superman Returns* (2006), director Bryan Singer had "sought a smaller project before embarking upon the eventually aborted sequel to *Superman Returns*" (Chitwood 61). He had had a previous experience filming Nazi subjects in *Apt Pupil* (1998).

The Reader (Stephen Daldry, 2008) is one of the most challenging films in this study due to its representation of a Nazi character. In the first part of the film, young student Michael (David Kross) becomes the lover of Hanna Schmitz (Kate Winslet), to whom he reads books; in the second part, he witnesses Hanna's trial; she is accused of being a Nazi concentration camp guard, held responsible for the murder of

three hundred female Jewish prisoners. The film portrays Michael's confusion confronted with such facts and at the same time presents Hanna as an ambiguous character. The killing scenes are never depicted, leading to potential doubts about her responsibility, as she is not presented as evil or cruel, rather arguing that she joined the SS simply for being an illiterate person in need of a job. The other co–defendants take advantage of her, accusing her as the only one responsible for the criminal act. The court sentences her to life; she proclaims her innocence about the killings, and ends up committing suicide in jail. Her portrayal is the most problematic of this second group of films: she is a complex character, not the unreasonable monster presented in the films of the first group, but a humane character, with passions and feelings, even if considered guilty of a horrendous Holocaust crime. The ability to love and have feelings may not make her less monstrous, but is this same ability that may signal a departure from the representation of previous Nazi characters. Also, one may be left in doubt about her guilt, or at least, the full extent of it. Thus, the film deals with the subject of living in a post–genocide society that went beyond mid–century Germany, when the film was set.

The Reader remains as a particular controversial book about the Holocaust. Despite the fact that it was well received in Germany, author Bernhard Schlink's problematic approach toward Hanna's guilt and her role in the Final Solution could be considered a major issue. Schlink has been accused of revising or falsifying history. Phillip Oltermann, writes that "the novel simplifies history and compels its readers to identify with the perpetrators" (02). Likewise, Frederic Raphael states that "no one could recommend the book without having a tin ear for fiction and a blind eye for evil" (10). Authors such as Ruth Franklin have suggested "that Hanna's illiteracy represented the ignorance that allowed ordinary people to commit atrocities" (201). Nevertheless, the novel (and the film) appear to justify Hanna's actions: "the implication that Hanna chose the job and acted as she did because of her illiteracy appears intended to exonerate her" (204). Thus, her characterization in the film remains extremely questionable.

The main reason to select these three films is that they present a new perspective on how to understand the representation of the Nazi world, its agents, and the Holocaust,

projecting the idea that not all Germans behaved according to Nazi political and racial standards, and even those who did such as the case in *The Reader*, may be represented as victims to Nazism itself as the brutality of its codes and ideology were so pervasive that rationality alone could hardly resist them. These characters seem to defy common stereotypes attributed to Nazi characters, demanding from the viewer the elaboration of a new reading of such characters. In spite of the fact that Nazism was a major catastrophe for the world, these more recent films suggest a different portrayal of the Nazi characters involved in the Holocaust and World War II. Many historical accounts show how the Nazis and their allies did commit horrors against millions of people, sacking entire countries, killing or enslaving many of their populations, and creating centers of organized extermination, as shown by the numbers previously presented. At the same time that these more recent films do not deny the genocide and ideological extension of Nazism, they also problematically endorse a portrayal of certain Nazis who were able to fight their own system or who were somehow victimized by Nazism itself. The whole Hollywood story–telling apparatus, based on the star system, individuallity, subjective POV shots, among many other narratological elements, is here used in the portrayal of the Nazi in different ways. Spielberg and Singer seem to present a heroic portrayal of the resisters against the Nazi system by using a Hollywoodian narrative system; whereas Daldry's film seems to invite a reading of the banalization of evil and its irrevocable process of brutalization regardless of social or cultural class within the German system. In this sense, the Hollywood apparatus is somehow defamiliarized as the melodrama and glamour of a love story are displaced by the horrors of violence.

Even if these films can be seen as more complex readings of the Holocaust and the Nazis as part of a postmodern revisionism of historical narratives, in which the micro narratives such as the one involving Stauffenberg could be included, the Germans were never historically marginalized nor can they be seen as minorities. Unlike the ethical and morally justified revisionism allowed by films like *Glory* or *Dances With Wolves*, in which the historical role of Afro–Americans or Native Peoples are redefined, the Germans were never victimized since they were a very developed and technological society, and as such, they

were never an oppressed minority. Directors like Spielberg are quite aware of these differences. Nevertheless, films like *Valkyrie*, *The Reader* and *Schindler's List* seem to suggest a new perspective that the stereotyping process, when seen from a totalizing formula to understand all Germans as Nazis, all behaving in the same way during the Nazi period, is somehow being reconsidered by these more recent films. A new reading that separates German resisters from Nazis may arise and be allowed perhaps because of the time that has passed between the end of the war and the 1990s, thus distancing such representations from the historical events these films choose to portray. Some degree of temporal distance may be useful as a constitutive feature of historical representation, as it may explain how such representations come into existence. Thus, an analysis of the films, as well as the cultural context from which they rise, could help to elucidate the dichotomies created by these more recent depictions of Nazi Germans and the Holocaust. If the first group of films centers on Germans whose individual choices can be seen as divested of any humanity, the second group finds more complex and humane characters and plots, whose changes and motivations deserve close attention. Along with a close reading of the films, theoretical backgrounds to the filmic analysis will be included.

THEORETICAL APPROACH

Considering that the films produced in the 1990s readdress the Holocaust and World War II by foregrounding different portrayals of German characters from those of earlier films, as a form of revision of history, postmodernist concepts, such as that of the "micronarrative", as opposed to "macronarrative", will be here introduced.

Postmodernism, a late twentieth–century movement, poses that Knowledge is articulated from specific perspectives, that are, almost by definition, beset with complexities and uncertainties and that these perspectives express themselves especially in the arts, culture, architecture, fiction, literature, literary criticism and history; thus, whatever is presented as knowledge should be subjected to skeptical examination. Terry Eagleton defines postmodernism as a certain form of contemporary culture,

understood as "a style of thought which is suspicious of classical notions of truth, reason, identity and objectivity, of the idea of universal progress or emancipation, of single frameworks, grand narratives or ultimate grounds of explanations" (vii). Eagleton's definition may help to understand why postmodern theory may be useful for this dissertation, as the filmic representation of specific Nazi characters as protagonists rather than antagonists, rescuers instead of killers, as heroes instead of villains, or as human beings with feelings even when perpetrators of major crimes may signal the existence of a breach in the way Nazism had been earlier portrayed by Hollywood. For example, the character of Oskar Schindler never behaves like a Nazi thug, who exploits his workers to death; he even begs them for forgiveness by the end of the film, describing himself as a slave labor profiteer, soon after saving them from being shot by the fleeing Nazi guards. Likewise, Cruise's Stauffenberg is an idealistic moral fighter, who goes to the point of stating already at the very beginning of *Valkyrie* that Germans in general despise the atrocities committed by the Nazis, arguing further that Hitler is an enemy to Germany itself, as well to the world. Both characters depart from the usual representation of Nazis, indicating that postmodern micronarratives may be able to understand them. These new representations suggest the need to find new explanations and different understandings in order to answer how such representations arise and what they may signify.

Postmodern theory is part of the post–structuralist movement that arises in order to demand new readings of history. Post–structuralism emphasizes microhistory, focusing on the portrayal of certain specific characters instead of relying on macrohistorical events that try to present a total and complete account of an historical happening. Likewise, postmodernism provided the strengthening of extra–official narratives, as a counter argument against official history, functioning as a sort of historical revisionism, which identifies the reinterpretation of the historical record, of orthodox views about historical events, or of evidences about them, or the motivations and decisions of its actors. It is considered as a continuous process of development and refinement of historical writing. It also reflects the contemporary discoveries of facts and evidence, and the rise of new interpretations, which are able to produce a revised history. Historical revisionism is ready to challenge official explanations,

and has come to be "an essential part of the process by which history, through the posing of new problems and the investigation of new possibilities, enlarges its perspectives and enriches its insights" (Schlesinger 165).

Within our contemporary moment, films have achieved a very important role, not only due to the proliferation of filmic narratives around the globe, but also to the higher status achieved by film within academic circles as a valid narrative, capable of depicting historical periods. Robert Brent Toplin argues that History in film is more than a genre, and is able to produce strong effects: "Cinematic history is too important to shove aside as simply fiction, entertainment, symbolism, or commentary about current events. The messages filmmakers communicate, directly and subtly, resonate with audiences in powerful ways, often shaping their ideas about the past's influence on the present" (07), thus the importance of understanding historical representation in film. Considering that films are highly fictionalized interpretative accounts, Tom Stempel states that "film scholars argue that a completely truthful presentation of the past is impossible, because there is no single truth to uncover. No historical interpretation is the real or correct one; all explanations of history are constructed." (161). Stempel also argues that "the narrative itself is a construction, formed out of the interests and ideological inclinations of the storyteller. Even history texts are interpretive dramatizations" (161).

Not that one particular interpretation would be better than others that are possible, but given the many different representations in film, historical facts are open to debate. Linda Hutcheon welcomes the postmodern intellectual's challenge to history's 'truth claim' "both by questioning the ground of that claim in historiography and by asserting that both history and fiction are discourses, human constructs, and both derive their major claim to truth from that identity" (161). Thus, in a film such as *The Reader*, without dismissing Nazi crimes, postmodern theory is able to offer, through the study of micronarratives, a less stereotypical approach to the character.

According to Hayden White, history, literature, and film are constructed along similar narrative patterns. White states that the historical narrative has "an irreducible and inexpungible element of interpretation" (51). It follows that historical accounts

are produced through a narrative form, that also presents an interpretation of the subject.

Historiography has become the subject of strong criticism regarding interpretation, as many critics went "so far as to argue that historical accounts are nothing but interpretations, in the establishment of the events that make up the chronicle of the narrative no less than in assessments of the meaning or significance of those events for the understanding of the historical process in general" (White 55). Nevertheless, to interpret an historical account is not the same as denying the historical account. Thus, the historical account is not to be discarded as if it were meaningless or untrue. Rather, exactly because of a certain relativism that the primacy of interpretation has generated in various circles of debate, the historical facts need to be taken ever more seriously into consideration. For instance, though representation and stereotypes are discursively created, the historical facts that the films depict (Nazism and the Holocaust being the most important) are not; they are historical and as such, historical stereotypes may be separated from historical accounts without the necessity of denying the latter.

As Robert Rosenstone argues, postmodern theory characterizes itself by a certain renouncing of traditional History and "the heart of postmodernism is a struggle against History, with a capital 'H', a denial of its narratives, findings, and truth claims" (202). Postmodernism has also brought into light new viewpoints, helping to complete and integrate certain official historical accounts. This perspective is especially important for the retrieval of the history of minorities, such as African–Americans, Latinos and Indigenous Peoples, but it needs to be clearly rejected if it triggers a process of forgetfulness of major macro narratives of enslavement, repression and genocide, which could then be the case of Nazism and the Holocaust.

In such a problematic line of reasoning one can include Fredric Jameson's view of the Holocaust. For Jameson, the Holocaust has a special place in the market of images as he understands it, as one of many ideological representations, and also a particularly strong one. Jameson states that "the attribution of the newfound embrace of market freedom to the fear of Stalinism and Stalin is touching but slightly misplaced in time, although certainly the current Gulag Industry has been a crucial component in the 'legitimation' of those ideological

representations, along with the Holocaust Industry" (274). Analyzing the relation between media and market, regarding specifically the Late Capitalist market, Jameson states that "we need to return to the theory of the image, recalling Guy Debord's remarkable theoretical deviation: the image as the final form of commodity reification" (276). If the Holocaust may stand as a symbol of victimization and suffering of a persecuted people, Jameson argues that Nazism, as well, may fit the part of evil, according to our contemporary view of the subject, creating narratives that help to form at least part of what he calls "construction of evil" (290). Thus, Nazism, its agents, and their actions would stand for "the people and forces who are collectively 'evil' in our contemporary world" (290). Against any relativization of history, as Jameson's statement seems to suggest, this dissertation positions itself for a retrieval of historical fact and its importance for an understanding of the possible flaws and complexities involved in the process of narrativizing the Holocaust, as in the case presented in *Schindler* and *Valkyrie*, where heroes and perpetrators belong to the same world.

Jean François–Lyotard understands Postmodernism as "incredulity towards metanarratives" (xxiv). A metanarrative would be a grand or major story that claims to be able to account, explain and subordinate lesser, smaller or local narratives. Among these are the French Enlightenment, and Marxism. The former, aimed to lead mankind to a new age of reason and science; the latter attempted to explain all social relations from an economic standpoint. The incredulity is evident when one may acknowledge that by "applying science and reason to the construction of gas chambers and efficient railroad schedules, the Nazis exterminated millions of human beings" (Powell 30). This argument does not aim to blame science and technology when used for criminal purposes, but to indicate that its barbaric use by the Nazis signals the need to rethink the Enlightenment and its promises of civilization.

Giovanni Levi has argued that "what has been called into question is the idea of a regular progression though a uniform and predictable series of stages in which social agents were considered to align themselves in conformity with solidarities and conflicts in some sense given, natural and inevitable" (94). As historians began to focus on social rather than economic factors, it became clear that certain political events and social realities

could not be explained adequately by existing macrohistorical models. Thus, macrohistorical narratives are unable to fully account for the experiences of all members of the event, society, or culture being studied. As a result, microhistorians have made a point of viewing people not as a group, but rather as "individuals who must not be lost either within the historical processes or in anonymous crowds" (Iggers 103). As Walter Woodward argues, "microhistory scrutinizes isolated topics to come to grips with the larger universe of historical circumstances and transformations" (01).

  This relativization of macro narratives can be seen as part of the whole postmodern context of distrust. Nevertheless, the issue of micro narratives is not raised to question the evils perpetrated by the Nazis, but to allow the inclusion of personal narratives, capable of retrieving lives never before taken into consideration by macro history, through the revision of certain historical narratives; those could be defined as micro narratives, that is the individual lives that are now shown by these films. Microhistory is defined as "the intensive historical investigation of a well-defined smaller unit of research (most often a single event, the community of a village, or an individual). In its ambition, however, microhistory can be distinguished from a simple case study insofar as microhistory aspires to ask large questions in small places" (Joyner 01).

  Alongside microhistory, it is important to address the issue of historical revisionism. Without aiming to defend a Neo–Nazi version of it, which completely denies the reality of the Holocaust, what historical revisionism does is to identify possible reinterpretations of the historical records, disputing the orthodox views about historical events, of the evidence of such events, and of the many possible motivations and decisions of historical characters. Historical revisionism is an ongoing process of development and redefinition of the writing of history. This revision is important because it reflects contemporary discoveries of fact, evidence, and interpretation; it also has the function of integrating new facts and interpretations into the historical records. Thus, one can conceive of forms of revisionism that do not lead to relativism.

  Without revisionist historians, who have done research in new sources and asked new and nuanced questions, we would remain mired in one or another of these stereotypes. Historical

revision "voided the existence of a definitive and universally accepted history, therefore, the revisionist historian presents the national public with a history that has been corrected and augmented with new facts, evidence, and interpretations of the historical record" (Novick 395). *Schindler* and *Valkyrie* appear to present a revision of history, without denying the horrors of the Holocaust or coming to the defense of Neo–Nazism; and in *The Reader*, what is presented is a more complex understanding of the ideology of Nazi Germany, and if consequence, of a Nazi character like Hanna Schmitz.

Beside the importance of postmodernist concepts such as micronarrative and its revision of history, this dissertation presents an analysis of the Hollywood apparatus for the films here examined. The whole narrative system of Hollywood, including its "star system" as a model to create heroes in Hollywood narratives, may have its role in presenting more sympathetic Nazis, when they are portrayed by actors with a record of positive roles, known to filmic audiences; this is an issue that will also be analyzed in the following section.

POLITICS OF REPRESENTATION

The ways in which we look at the world are created by many elements, including the media that surrounds us; thus, the ideas and meanings produced by representations are important issues to this dissertation, more specifically the ways in which these representations may carry within them political meanings. It is very important to find out when media representations of certain events or people carry such meanings, and what these meanings are. Politically, Hollywood is a tremendously powerful filmic industry, and its films have the power to create historical accounts and influence the understanding of historical subjects. Striving to create representations about America and other social and national groups, Hollywood indulges in speaking "on behalf of some other persons or groups. On the symbolic battlegrounds of the mass media, the struggle over representation in the simulacrum realm homologizes that of the political sphere, where questions of imitation and representation easily slide into issues of delegation and voice" (Stam 183). In this context, German agents are given new representations of resistance, and through

the voice of powerful movie stars, the politics over its portrayals, which previously depicted them as evil characters, is somehow transformed, shedding a different light on some historical or fictitious German characters, in a form which such characters were seldom, if ever, represented. Thus, the new discourse about Nazi Germany marks a new representational policy, which is worthy of research.

As an international, wide-reaching media form, the cinema can create multiple representations to present and to sell images and ideas about historical events, through the depiction of people, groups, politics, war, history and gender. As a political and historical event, Nazism is an important subject to be discussed in film media, carrying in itself its gigantic historical significance and importance in global memory. The cultural memory of Nazism relies strongly on the idea that the Nazi system was definitely a cruel one. In this way, it is of significance that contemporary Hollywood is beginning to introduce more complex narratives of the Holocaust by introducing more complex characters.

The more contemporary Hollywood films present a different view from those in which Germans were always seen as treacherous. As critic Janet Ward has suggested, most Hollywood films on the Holocaust take to themselves not only the burden to represent a European chapter of History, but also a Jewish and a German one, thus, creating a politics of representations that in the case of the Holocaust constitutes a phenomenon called the Americanization of the Holocaust. Through the use of mass media, including film, America was able to create "new narrative frameworks, mediated by political and cultural institutions, which reconfigured the Holocaust as a decontextualized event, as an Americanized global icon" (Ward 35). However, the new films foreground a more complex formulation of Nazism and the German characters associated with it, by showing that there were exceptions. This dissertation aims to discuss these new ways of representing German characters in films which move away from the simple and common stereotypes of evil that were associated with Hollywood representations of Nazis.

SPECIFIC TERMINOLOGIES

To clarify the terminology used in this dissertation, some specific terms need to be defined. Representation is the act of presenting something through a certain medium. Very important to filmic analysis, because of its ability to create interpretations and explanations throughout images, representation can be understood as a form of discourse, which is "a mediated version of an already textualized and 'discursivized' socioideological world" (Stam 180), meaning that film, as one among many artistic discourses, reflects a historical and social conception of history and reality. Thus, Robert Stam argues, artistic representations, such as those presented by films, "are at the same time thoroughly and irrevocably social, precisely because the discourses that art represents are themselves social and historical" (180). Stam concludes by arguing that any subject of representation is "deeply immersed in historical circumstance and social contingency" (180); it is very important to unravel the circumstances and contingencies that allow the surfacing of new representations of Nazism and its agents.

Stereotypes bestow certain characteristics that aim to explain a people or culture in its totality, but recent films appear to challenge the way Germans have been portrayed on screen, and propose representations that escape the usual stereotype, which can be defined as the misrepresentation of a particular group of people, given by the "repeated, ultimately pernicious constellations of character traits" (Stam 198). Many Germans supported the Nazis, but there were exceptions among them, who became disenchanted or disgusted by the regime's actions. To represent all Germans as Nazis, which has been done by Hollywood cinema to exhaustion ever since the war, was always a good opportunity to represent America's heroics; if on one side it would demonstrate how bad Nazis were, on the other, it would show how the Americans were different, heroically resisting and sacrificing themselves to overcome the brutal regime. It is of tremendous importance to remark that this research does not aim to deny the horrors and atrocities committed by the Nazis, which are known beyond doubt, or to diminish the valor of Americans who fought against them, but to understand these new representations, which challenge the stereotype that all Germans were Nazi criminals and behaved accordingly, without any kind

of exception. What matters is to understand how the new representations are constituted, and what light they shed on the fact that even among the Germans were resisters who endangered themselves, an idea that begins to appear perhaps due to the fact of historical distance between the events and the representation of them.

One of the major claims of postmodernism is its diagnosis of the crisis of master narratives, which signals a search for, and understanding of, micro and local histories, instead of grand narratives that aim to explain the totality of a certain phenomenon, such as Nazism. Lyotard criticizes the totalizing nature of master narratives and their reliance on some form of "transcendent and universal truth" (Lyotard xxiv–xxv). The master narratives also ignore the heterogeneity or variety of human existence. Kerwin Lee Klein states that "metanarrative is institutionalized, canonical, and legitimizing. It is in a position of intellectual mastery. It ignores the obvious pagan truism that stories refer to other stories" (282). Instead, as the author says, "it pretends to represent an external object and then pretends not to be a narrative. Local narrative, on the other hand, is told by the subaltern. It is never omniscient, but always aware of its own narrative debts" (282). Thus, the master narrative gives way to more located stories, that are able to deal with problems arising from the representation of Nazism and the Holocaust such as those presented in the films, and understanding such specific local narratives through the consideration of microhistory.

Elements very common to Hollywood narratives, the melodrama, the star system and the actor's personas are explained and discussed, and may serve to understand how the representation is constituted in the films here studied. The melodramatic representation "sets out to demonstrate within the transactions of everyday life the continuing operation of a Manichean battle between good and evil which infuses human actions with ethical consequences and therefore with significance" (209); therefore, it is a format that addresses well the theme of Nazism. The Star System creates and explores actors considering them as icons of filmic culture; the star–performer "makes sense through the combination of a particular star image with a particular film context. It arises when we check whether an actor's presence in a film seems to correspond with his or her professional role" (Naremore 262). The persona of an actor is

involved with the star system: it deals with the expectation of this or that star considering the roles they usually perform; as Christine Geraghty states, it is "the duality between actor and character" (172), the same "duality of image which is deemed to mark a star, a duality which emphasizes a balance between the site of fictional performance and life outside" (184–185).

CRITICISM OF POSTMODERN THEORY

Critics of postmodern theory such as Charles Colson have deemed the posmodernist era "as ideologically agnostic and replete with moral relativism or situation ethics" (03), something that must be taken into serious consideration regarding the Holocaust. An event such as this should not be relativized, or else one would be taking as relative the killing and suffering of millions of people. However, Nazi horrors and fight against them having been depicted repeatedly, interest shifted to the possibility that even within the Nazi world there were people who were able to resist and condemn said horrors. The idea that the actions of some German agents could be portrayed as more complex and with elements of humanity provided the producers of narratives with other, unexplored perspectives on the period, presumably able to awaken new interest in the subject.

Josh McDowell and Bob Hostetler define postmodernism critically as a "worldview characterized by the belief that truth does not exist in any objective sense but is created rather than discovered" (208). The authors argue that in postmodernism truth is "created by the specific culture and exists only in that culture. Therefore, any system or statement that tries to communicate truth is a power play, an effort to dominate other cultures" (208). Criticism against postmodernism may attack what can be seen as a tendency in it to abandon of objective truth, as it offers a metanarrative in the place of truth. The metanarrative is characterized by being a "narrative about narratives of historical meaning, experience or knowledge, which offers a society legitimation through the anticipated completion of a (as yet unrealized) master idea" (Childers and Hentzi 186). Thus, "to denounce metanarratives and applaud the proliferation of local narratives is to resist totalitarian universal history and political oppression" (Klein 284). Nevertheless, relativism may lead to

postmodernism being used in a distorted manner, especially when dealing with an extreme sensitive issue such as the Holocaust.

One of the major problems with the application of postmodern theory is its use of an excessive revisionism or relativism. Although a stereotype is simply a discursive construction that leads to schematic views of reality, without a clear relation to history, such as World War II, one cannot run the risk of simply relativizing historical facts according to one's view. Although history is constructed through narrative and discourse, the historical fact is not discursive. Furthermore, the historical film and war film are major media events capable of influencing the opinion of a whole generation. Nazi atrocities such as the Holocaust, and other extermination campaigns is a reality, not an ideology, as defended by Neo–Nazi adherents. Thus, it is important to separate what is a film stereotype from history, even if in Hollywood narratives they are many times joined together.

The process of creating stereotypes in film narratives is a relative subject, but an excess of relativism can end by inverting the stereotype and relativizing the genocide, the Holocaust and the participation of Nazi Germans is a clear deviation from history. Resistance to Nazism is a historically viable subject, but the distortion of history is not. In this sense, this dissertation aims to analyze the more recent films on the Holocaust and Nazi Germany in conjunction with the postmodern context in which they arise.

At the same time that postmodernism invites new insights into our contemporary culture by allowing new readings of historical events, one must be also aware of the process of distortion and relativization of the historical event promoted by a mediatized society; that is, one should avoid distortions in historical accounts of the Holocaust. With this critical perspective in mind, the more contemporary films on the Holocaust and Nazi Germany may open a space for the portrayal of Germans, who were not Nazis regarding its specific ideology, as they are seen in a new role, that of resisters to the Nazi system. Likewise, it may allow an understanding of the role portrayed by Kate Winslet in *The Reader*, as a perpetrator, but at the same time, a humane and complex character, whose actions may allow a reading of the character that escapes the simple stereotypical roles played by Germans in the Hollywood film industry. How are characters

constructed in these movies, if they are really more humane, complex and less simplistic, and what allows them to be seen as such are the two main questions to be pursued in this dissertation. An understanding of what seems to be the more humane vision of the Nazi and German protagonists in these films during World War II in the late 1990s and entering the 21st century is one of the main questions to be answered in this thesis.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

By producing a discourse where Germans are heroes, resisters to Nazism, or even victims, the films may propose several research questions, besides the one formulated above. Among those are: are the movies portraying the German characters in a more complex ways and how are they being portrayed? Could representations in films such as *Schindler*, *Valkyrie* and *Reader* indicate a larger cultural shift that deals not just with Nazi history but also with representation of History? If so, how do these films provide a shift in the representation of historical knowledge? Are they promoting the idea of resistance against Nazism by German characters? What is the cultural and historical context in which such representations can be explained? Could it be that the Nazi characters in *Schindler*, *Valkyrie* and *Reader* are just an inversion of the stereotype or are they foregrounding more complex ways of representing German characters in the Nazi world?

In order to answer those possible research questions, there will be (1) an analysis of films regarding their uses of the Hollywood narrative apparatus and filmic devices; (2) a comparison of the different portrayals of Nazi/German characters in the following films: *Sophie's Choice*, *Escape From Sobibor*, *Saving Private Ryan*, *Schindler's List*, *Valkyrie* and *The Reader*; (3) an analysis of how postmodern theory can help to explain and/or contextualize these representations. For this contextualization, Hayden White's concept of narrative in the historical film and Giovanni Levi's definition of micro narrative, as well as Jean François–Lyotard's critique of metanarratives, among others, will be used. Finally, I will attempt to present the different approaches to Nazism and the Holocaust provided by these films. Correlated research questions to be pursued are the

role of the star system in these films, if History is being pushed away only to promote film stars, and provide their films a profitable run, and to what extent these representations are related to the crisis of the master narratives as promoted by contemporary postmodern critics.

The dissertation is organized according to the development of three main chapters. Chapter I, "Postmodern Theory Criticism and Contemporary Holocaust Films", deals with the theoretical approach to this thesis. The main tenets of postmodern theory are here discussed. Hayden White, Fredric Jameson, Robert Rosenstone, among others, will be helpful towards an understanding of the importance of representation and history within postmodern theory. The chapter also proposes a discussion about Nazi stereotypes as portrayed in films, the crisis of master narratives, and the identification between evil and Nazism. It discusses the importance of micro narratives within our contemporary moment and the revisioning of history it allows, which is given by postmodern theory.

Chapter II, "Representation of Evil Nazi Characters in *Sophie's Choice*, *Escape from Sobibor* and *Saving Private Ryan*", discusses how specific Nazi characters are constructed in these works, and contains the analysis of key scenes in the films above mentioned.

Chapter III, "The Changing Role of Nazi Characters in *Schindler's List*, *Valkyrie* and *The Reader*", presents an analysis of these three films about Nazi history. In these films, representation of Nazi characters seems to propose a quite different portrayal from that of the first group of films. These more recent films present the Nazi characters as resisters against Nazism and its policies, as they conspire against the Nazi regime in Germany and rescue Holocaust victims; Germans are also protagonists, and they become victims of Nazism. The chapter analyzes how this new model of Nazi character is presented and constructed in the films and what allows such more humane vision of the Nazi and German protagonists, when compared to former representations.

Chapter IV, "Final Statements", discusses the results of the research.

CHAPTER I

REPRESENTATIONS OF NAZI CHARACTERS

AND POSTMODERN THEORY

OVERVIEW OF THE FILMS

This chapter will discuss major theoretical concepts used for filmic analysis: representation, the crisis of master narratives, microhistory and micronarratives, stereotypes, and their relation to the representation of Nazi characters in films depicting the Nazi era and the Holocaust, as well as historical information regarding that period. Furthermore, postmodern theory will be the theoretical framework used to examine representation in these films, and how historical distance from the events may help to understand the films under discussion. Concepts applied to films such as melodrama, the star system and the star personas will also be discussed.

REPRESENTATION

One major theoretical investment in postmodern theory has been the issue of representation, as we are surrounded by images and narratives that can present several interpretations of the same subject, and of its relations with people and its effects, thus potentially presenting new forms of understanding similar themes. Films that represent historical events such as Nazism and the Holocaust are able to create new forms of understanding the tragic story of Nazism, its agents, the people and nations who were subjected to Nazism, and the various ethnical groups killed in massive number, as well as the German people.

The possibility of recovering such stories in film leads one to think about the political and social implications of filmic representation. Bill Nichols states that "film theory has undertaken a radical revision of previous positions both to bring to light what was evident on the surface all along – stereotyping, bigotry, bias – and to reveal what was not – alternative

subjectivities and orientations" (Nichols 41), an idea that can be applied to films on Nazism. As I have pointed out in my previous chapter, contemporary films about Germans living in the Nazi Era, such as *Schindler's List*, *Valkyrie*, and *The Reader*, suggest a different view of its German characters during the Nazi Era, as they were portrayed in previous films, and a turn to alternative subjectivities. In the three titles mentioned above, such characters may be seen in a different light than in the previous films in which Germans and Nazis were presented as the same, by being both systematically seen as villains. *Schindler's List* and *Valkyrie* may indicate that there were exceptions to the general behavior of most Germans at that time, regarding especially the Holocaust: in *Schindler*, the title character saves 1,200 Jews, and in *Valkyrie*, the main character plans to shut down all concentration camps after he and his co–conspirators have engineered Hitler's fall. And despite the fact that the criminal actions of *The Reader*'s main character remain atrocious, she is portrayed as a lovable, caring character for the main male character. She participated in a Holocaust crime, but her sadism and cruelty are not portrayed. The film leaves this particular behavior in doubt and as a possibility, because the criminal scene is never depicted.

Historical accounts are clear about how Nazis were responsible for implementing and executing a State policy called the "Final Solution" or "Holocaust", the systematic persecution and murder of European Jews. In many films, such as *Sophie's Choice*, *Escape From Sobibor* and *Saving Private Ryan*, the Nazis are represented as villains who engage in murder and other criminal acts related to the Holocaust. But *Schindler*, *Valkyrie* and *The Reader* appear to present the idea that some Germans were also resisters to Nazi policies, as in *Schindler's List* and *Valkyrie*, to the extent of becoming victims themselves, or at least as more ambiguous, complex characters, as appears to be the case in *The Reader*; they also present a much more humane side of the German characters, long portrayed as a complete group of villains. Two major questions arise from this notion: how the representation of some classes of characters, previously perceived solely as criminals (a representation that considered Germans and Nazis as all the same) shifts from one of villain–perpetrator to one of resister (or if it is possible for the perpetrator to have a more complex portrayal, such as is the case of *The Reader*); also how Hollywood has recently constructed such different

perspectives about German characters. Postmodern theory and its emphasis on the importance of representation can help contextualize more recent readings of history in Hollywood filmic representation. The concept may help to understand Hollywood turn's to alternative subjectivities as foregrounded in the recent films mentioned above. It is important as well to know under what circumstances and contexts representations of some Germans as resisters or heroes, who may exonerate themselves (but not the Nazis) for the Nazi crimes by acting against the Nazis and their policies, are accepted and justified. In a more complex way, *The Reader* also conveys its female German protagonist not simply as a monster, but also as a human being, considering a representation where she is a Holocaust perpetrator, but at the same time someone who is presented as loving and caring for someone, something that was absent in previous representations of Nazi characters.

It is in this context that representation becomes an important term, as it "bears much of the burden of mediating the relationship between symbolic forms of communication and the social or historical context in which they occur and to which they refer. The new representations of the Germans during the war may help us to understand the social and political context in which they occur; dealing with the sensitive issue that some Germans were even responsible for taking action against the Nazis' genocidal acts; their portrayal as more humane, in contemporary films naturally demand that some time should have passed since the historical facts to rise into prominence. Decades passed before these stories became films, e. g. *Schindler* and the protagonist in *Valkyrie*. German resistance in Hollywood is becoming visible and might be discussed in films, once Nazi history goes on becoming part of a more distant past each year. Representation deals with the issue of "who gets to represent what to whom and why; what image, icon or person shall stand for what to whom are questions in a form that allows issues of visibility and cinematic representation to tie into issues of social and political consequence" (Nichols 45). As Nichols further points out, representation may "stand for and, in some sense, be a compelling manifestation of that which has not yet received tangible representation, that which has not yet been brought into a condition of visibility, even though socially present" (45). The more visible fact of German resistance offers another paradigm to

portray the Nazi era: in the first two films, Germans are presented as anti–Nazi resisters; in the third one, the main female character may go beyond the monster stereotype. These representations signal the importance of researching and understanding the context which allows these films to appear and circulate: "we may not know what it is that a representation, a symbolic sign system or utterance, a film or a painting, stands for if we do not share the cultural context from which it stems" (43–44). Nichols argues that " even if we do understand a message, we may still discover that any representation can appear to be one thing only to turn out to be another" (43–44). Thus, the context of Hollywood's filmic production must be acknowledged.

Films also present a narrativization of historical facts, and have a social role by influencing ways of perceiving the past and the present as they express an interpretation of a historical past. As films portray historical periods, they can be accepted as a representation and an interpretation of historical facts. They may present a vision or a way to understand the world. As explained by Robert Stam, "cinema is equipped in the ideal manner to magically multiply times and spaces; it has the capacity of mixing temporalities and spaces that are very different; a fiction film, for example, is produced in an array of times and places, and represents another constellation (diegetic) of times and spaces, still received in still another time and space" (33). Thus, cinema is an important tool to represent historical subjects and times.

The films examined in this dissertation are not simple entertainment, but products of a very large and powerful film industry, counting on very popular and recognizable directors and actors. Part of a major mass culture, the film narratives about Germans living through the Nazi Era as heroes may articulate a desire to recover stories through which Germans may be able to confront their traumatic past, perhaps by seeing themselves on a new way on the silver screen, this according to Hollywood, that may follow suit to Germany's own desire to understand the Nazi past, expressed in their politics, news and films as well. Considering how they have acknowledged their misdeeds as a nation, how they have politically apologized for them (e. g. the actions of politicians such as Konrad Adenauer and Willy Brandt), and also how they even tried to do financial restitution, the new films portray them not only as perpetrators of the barbaric regime, but also as resisters to the Third Reich, or at

least as more complex characters. Hopefully, the objective is not to exonerate the whole nation, or those who actively participated in the regime's crimes, but to give less stereotyped portrayals of Germans, recognizing the issue of resistance, and the fact that the crimes, horrible as they were, in the end were perpetrated not by mindless monsters, but by willing human beings. Many of them indeed became mindless monsters, but *Schindler* and *Valkyrie* are able to present some resistance episodes; meanwhile, *The Reader* stands perhaps as an example of how the process of creating narrations in film might be generalized, although it never presents the central character's criminal actions.

POSTMODERN THEORY

Postmodern theory has offered important insights into the historical revisionist impulse in contemporary art: "theories of postmodernism, as far as the visual arts go, have stressed that we are no longer able to defend, with any certainty, the terrain of modernism; we have reached the limits of its unfolding breaks, its projective horizons. Uncomfortable as it may be, we are now in a period of unparalleled pluralism" (Roberts 01). Thus, postmodernism refers to a state of "institutionalized pluralism, variety, contingency and ambivalence" (Baumann 238). The postmodern experience denies the notions of universalization, rationalization or systematization once proclaimed by modernist theory as part of a major social process that would lead to an ultimate destination. This means that such theory may be useful for the analysis of films that present Germans living through the Nazi period, but behaving differently from how they did in previous portrayals – thus, the issue of pluralism: not all Germans were Nazis, nor did they behave as such. And even if they did, uncomfortable as it may be, they were rather (and disturbingly) human, not mythological monsters. Our perception of the Nazi phenomenon changes, not in the sense of excusing, justifying or exonerating the Nazis' actions, but by complementing history with the uncommon stories of the main characters in these three films.

Thus, this theory affirms the processes of "continuity and discontinuity as two faces of the intricate relationship between the present social condition and the formation that originates and

gestates it" (Baumann 238), and also as "a site of constant mobility and change" (240). Likewise, "postmodernism, with its definition of the contemporary world as a realm of fragmentation, dissociation and the post–personal, seems to dissolve the cultural continuities of community and individual ego to which earlier artistic eras remained loyal. Postmodernism, in other words, declares the death of cultural authenticity" (Mikics 18). The process of revisionism of grand narratives has allowed for a revisionist view of history as well. Robert Rosenstone states that among the major characteristics of history in film according to postmodern theory are: to "recount it from a multiplicity of viewpoints […]; alter and invent incident and character […]; never forget that the present is the site of all past representation and knowing (206). He also states that this theory better suits the burden to recreate Holocaust events by arguing that "the recent debate surrounding the possibility of representing the history of the Holocaust impinges upon the notion of the postmodern historical film" (216). Robert Burgoyne argues that the historical film reflects "the prevailing historical understanding and knowledge of the era in which it was produced" (26). To understand the interpretation that the historical film carries within itself is to research into the context in which it was produced. The historical film is also able to provoke "controversy and widespread public debate about the meaning of the past, about the limits of dramatic interpretation, and about the power of film to influence popular understanding" (22), themes that are worthy an analysis when considering the historical understanding of the Holocaust and its representations. Microhistory may be the suitable format to analyze the narratives in the films of this research, considering that, as Burgoyne states, "the meaning of the past is contestable, because the questions we ask of the event cannot be answered with any semblance of mastery or totality" (95), especially when dealing with the difficulty of representation or "the possibility of finding a rational explanation for events so monumentally irrational" (Rosenstone 216), such as the Holocaust.

Postmodern theory brought the Holocaust and its multiple and relative possibilities to be represented as one of its concerns: "the premises and insights of a variety of discourses, notably post–structuralism, deconstruction, psychoanalysis in its newer versions, metahistory, and postmodern theory in general, have at

once been applied to and checked against the Holocaust" (Varon 84). However, relativism becomes a key concern when dealing with the statements foregrounded by postmodernism. As stated by Varon: "postmodern theory has been perhaps nowhere so controversial as in its tendency towards relativism, emanating from the overarching postmodem conviction in the social construction of virtually everything" (87). Postmodern relativism denies any kind of absolute and focuses on the relativity of all social discourses; instead of a certain essencialist truth to be discovered, postmodernism emphasizes and criticizes the power and context of the many forms of social constructions: "the specter of relativism has been raised within at least three related critical contexts: radical epistemological skepticism directed at Enlightenment investments in rationality; deconstructive accounts of the indeterminacy of language; and analyses of the role of power in the spurious construction of essences and universals" (87). History, from this perspective, has been viewed as a topic of strong and particular criticism: "History, among the most methodologically conservative disciplines, has been nonetheless influenced by a postmodern skepticism that contests unitary meaning in history and the possibility of objective historical knowledge" (88). Within the context of this research of historical films on the Holocaust and Nazism, relativism needs to be considered with great care, since at the same time that it allows for a revisoning of historical master narratives, it can also relativize criminal and tragic historical events such as Nazism and the Holocaust. In this sense the filmic analysis here proposed will be pursued to scrutinize the films' explicit and implicit meanings. The film versions of Oskar Schindler and Klaus von Stauffenberg's stories are well known, and are known to be based on historical records. The micronarratives they constitute may help to mark the crisis of master narratives, validating postmodern theory, and at the same time may allow the integration of these stories into the whole of the Nazi period. *The Reader* presents a greater challenge, though – the representation of a sexy, likeable perpetrator (which is fictitious, despite presenting some similarities to real life Nazis), even if she was a minor component in the Nazi's machine of destruction, this is not enough to justify or exonerate her actions. This may signal a limit to the use of postmodern theory, which should not be used to dismiss or erase an atrocity such as the Holocaust. But what may

be characterized as postmodern, at least, is her representation as a character – rather than being a simplistic, detestable monster (such as the Nazi characters in *Sobibor*, for example), she is recognized a Nazi perpetrator, and still, is also presented as being able to love and to suffer, presenting a more complex and less stereotyped depiction, and marking a departure from previous portrayals of Nazi characters.

Postmodern theory sees historical narratives as a discourse, a construction socially and temporally situated. To understand the historical context is to understand social perceptions of it and how these societies represent historical knowledge, such as representations in films. To study films about the Nazi period is to study not only the societies they represent but also the societies that have produced them, their viewpoints and their relations with the subject. According to Jeremy Varon, "postmodern theory has built on and radicalized this rich precedent that doubts the possibility of historical objectivity." (88). Varon argues that "postmodern insight has shifted discussions of subjectivity from the limitations of the individual perspective of historians and their socio–historic location to both the constitutive properties and the profound limitations of language" (88).

The objective here is not to be extremely radical, but to understand that, though it does not assert that all political statements are probably false, postmodernism may lead to new forms of understanding and retrieving the validity of historical accounts. According to Lewin, "the Holocaust appeals to postmodernist concerns because of the appearance of the exclusion of transparent meaning and the questioning of the referential adequacy of texts to 'the real world'" (Lewin 163). Within this context, the various narratives of the Holocaust within recent filmography can be understood as attempts to find new meanings and roles for the various peoples and nations involved during the Nazi regime.

Postmodern theory must not be used as a justification to deny or minimize the horrors or the reality of the Holocaust; instead, it may present new interpretations or meanings for it, that do not seem as absolute or transparent. If films like *Sophie's Choice*, *Escape From Sobibor* and *Saving Private Ryan* seem to guide the viewer to identify with the victims of Nazism, in *Schindler's List*, *Valkyrie* and *The Reader* although the possibility of identification remains, it is directed toward the perpetrators's

people, the Germans, who either oppose Nazi actions or are presented in a more humane, complex personification. As Margrit Frölich points out, "the public is more willing to see things from the perspective of the victim. To see things from the position of the criminal is far more onerous. But we still need to be prepared to do it; otherwise there can be no progress." (76). Frölich also states that "it is not my wish that there should only be films about criminals. But so far, this perspective has been entirely ignored. And this repression necessarily has implications for storytelling" (Frölich 76).

Thus, it is necessary to evaluate how movies have come to ask their viewers to put themselves in the place of people who were part of the Nazi world, instead of their victims, and to what extent these contemporary readings can mean a more critical perception of the Nazi system or a washing away of historical perspective.

To see things from the position of the criminal is exactly what happens in *Schindler's List* and *The Reader*. Oskar Schindler is presented in Spielberg's film first as a war and slave labour profiteer, someone who uses his Jewish workers as a source of hard labor to make himself rich, and Hanna Schmitz of *The Reader* is a direct Holocaust perpetrator. Although Stauffenberg has no relation to the Holocaust in *Valkyrie*, he is presented as a member of the armed forces of Nazi Germany. Schindler's and Stauffenberg's actions somehow make it possible to see them as different from the common Nazi type, resisters and/or ideologically opposed – anything but perpetrators: "sensitization to the perspective of the victims and to their stories, which in fact came about only gradually in the first place, gained its central importance primarily because it made it easier for people to distance themselves from the perpetrators" (Frölich 76). It is important to approach the perpetrators' universe in order to understand these new representations regarding Germans and their role in the Holocaust; their allegiance was not unanimous, as suggested by the films. According to Colleen Colebrook, postmodernism offers some possibilities to understand these films: the first one would be "the approach usually associated with cultural studies, post–colonial theory, postmodern theory and literary theory." (47) Colebrook also suggests that "there is nothing outside representation. Truth, the real, legitimation, philosophy and the world are effects of textuality" (47).

Under this concept, history exists as a product of representation. In the second one, presenting itself "against the legitimating metanarratives of modernity, postmodernism returns all those grand truth claims to the domain of representation" (48). The first way is at least controversial: Holocaust accounts are not simple products of representation, because Nazi atrocities are well documented. The second reading of postmodernist emphasis on representation allows one to question a totalizing account of Germans during the Nazi regime with a retrieval of narratives of resistance, in which some Germans played a role against their Nazi leaders, and it is their stories that *Schindler's List* and *Valkyrie* are trying to recover. The films' micronarratives that come forward to allow new readings of Germans' behaviors during the Nazi period could be seen within the context of postmodenism and its emphasis on micronarratives. That may explain how grand, coherent, and evolutionary narratives have given way to local and microhistories, "and the gaps and ruptures in our knowledge of the past are foregrounded rather than smoothed over", as stated by Vivian Sobchak (301). In the films, there is no huge–scale narrative that pretends to explain the totality of the Nazi phenomena; instead, what is presented are the micronarratives of the three major characters located inside the Nazi world: a businessman, an Army officer and a female guard. In *Sophie's Choice*, the narrative option is already microhistory; nevertheless, it was used to tell a survivor's story, not one that arises from the core of the perpetrators' world.

History in films is constituted by interpretations, thus it is not strictly located within its correspondence to written History, but to a contemporary consciousness of it, and to representations of historical facts: "the practice and writing of film history are bound irreducibly to our current consciousness of history its representation in general" – and "that consciousness has been complicated by our own historically–altered sense of what 'being–in–time' in relation to the 'past' feels like and what it means in a culture of pervasive mass-mediation and 'present' second-hand experience" (Sobchak 302).

It is also important that potentially sensitive historical themes may suffer a variety of different interpretations, none necessarily offering the final or definitive account of the topic: "at the present moment, then, the once merely 'twice-told tales' called history are now understood as 'thrice-told' – that is, further

and exponentially elaborated through the mass-mediated proliferation of any number of representational forms and foci, through a multitude of contestatory narratives, and through a variety of present desires and ideological investments." (303).

Postmodernism disputes the findings of history and presents in itself three founding negations: the first one is "of totalization, that is an antagonism to discourses which address a transcendental subject, define an essential human nature, or proscribe collective human goals" (388); the other is "the negation of teleology (whether in the form of authorial purpose or historical destiny);" and finally, "the negation of utopia, that is a skepticism about what Lyotard calls the 'grands recits' of the West, the faith in progress, science or class struggle" (Stam 388-389).

Postmodernism, which offers new possibilities regarding the study of cultural products such as film and representation, becomes a key concept to our understanding of the political struggles and "symbolic battleground of the mass media" (390).

In a similar way, Hayden White's understanding of history in postmodernism makes use of interpretation and narrative as important tools for our understanding of the constructed nature of historiography: "in a series of important works, he has claimed that history is interpretation 'all the way down,' with narrative serving as the dominant mode of historical interpretation since the modern period when history tried to establish itself on scientific grounds (Varon 90). The author states that regarding White' work, "facts, presumably the raw material of historical understanding, are not intrinsically 'story-like' and do not, in themselves, mandate any particular narrative treatment" (90). Narrative would be the form through which historical discourses are to be constructed, but not the historical facts; what may be considered controversial in History is the discourse historians made about the facts. Jeremy Varon calls attention to the process of relativization of History within postmodernism and the proliferation of narratives. As he says: "narrative, therefore, is essentially imposed on otherwise meaningless facts. By extension, meaning in history is radically subjective, as it is constituted through discrete acts of emplotment and interpretation" (90). However, History may claim at least documentary faithfulness: the Holocaust and its reality must not

be relativized since historical documentation is clear about such facts.

What may come up for consideration is the possibility of retrieving from history episodes and actors that may help us to understand the German Nazi era from a more complex and complete view, in which the resistance to the Nazi regime may come from the inside of Germany at that time, from groups and individuals who were historically erased. This historical revision or complementing side of the picture, which seems to be the case with these more recent films, may even bring a harsher critique to the ideological power of the Nazi regime.

In a similar vein to Varon's perspective on the role of narratives in the dissemination of history, Hayden White shows the correlations between fiction and history as both imply interpretation of historical facts. Although he acknowledges the different roles of the arts and history in their comprehension of the world, both make use of a subjective and interpretative perspective as well in their organization of the historical events to a certain extent. As White states, although "art and science are essentially different ways of comprehending the world" (28), the science of history and the arts may present some form of discourse regarding a particular theme. Historians themselves have noticed and criticized the notion of history as an objective science that may claim to have the final or absolute word about a subject. Literary discourse may open many new possibilities for viewing historical themes and make available a wider array of understandings and interpretations of the past. If the "past is what we decide to remember": the "past has no existence out of the consciousness we have had from it" (White 51). Thus, the historical experience presents "an irreducible and inexpungeable element of interpretation" (51). Nonetheless, White calls for attention to the ethical implications of historical accounts and their construction in various discursive forms, it is very important to observe that what postmodernism may call sometimes "the denial of history" should be taken with a grain of salt. The brutal facts of the Nazi period did happen, and the Holocaust is not a theme to be denied. Postmodernism may nevertheless help to bring forward complementary ways to understand such a theme, opening new grounds and constructing new meanings.

The contrast between old and recent representations of the Holocaust can help to understand these new interpretations of the

historical event. Furthermore, even if the films analyzed are historical in nature, they are also a fictional form of narrative, and they employ narrative forms of encoding. Multiple representations may make History a poliphony, without meaning that the historical facts are relative: the reality of the Holocaust is not in dispute. What is necessary is to recognize that even when dealing with narratives about Nazism and the Holocaust, History, when represented in film, is also "a possible object of narrative representation and discursive analysis" (144). As narration is an interpretation of the events, the researcher must "establish the value of the studies about the past, not as an end in itself, but as a means to provide perspectives about the present that may contribute for the solution of particular problems of our time" (White 53). Instead of simply understanding the historical subject of the Holocaust, of World War II, or the role played by Germans in films as entertainment, it is possible to analyze those representations, and how the changes associated with them can be contextualized within their own historical moment.

Holocaust stories can be dramatic, suspenseful, horrific, usually asking us to identify with those characters that the Nazis are against, such as Sophie, the Jews imprisoned at Sobibor, or the American soldiers and the allies. In the other three films here analyzed (*Schindler's List*, *Valkyrie* and *The Reader*), the viewer faces the problem of viewing the events from the perpetrator's world. These films, along with other recent movies, bring forth a different perspective and narrative construction of the Germans and their participation in the Nazi regime. After all, in Germany, as in other German–occupied countries, there were people who reacted against Nazism even under dangerous circumstances. The problem, however, is that films seem to suggest an overgeneralization about the role of the resisters. The majority of Germans went along with the persecution, either actively or passively, from Nazi conviction or out of fear. According to Varon:

> each way of thinking about the Holocaust provides information, insight, and affect that others do not. Such a pluralism generically embraces everything from political histories of the rise of the Third Reich; to detailed accounts of the 'machinery of

destruction' that was employed; to macabre or even satirical portrayals of the Holocaust; to descriptions of the banality of evil; to survivor testimony; to potentially sentimental juxtapositions of human savagery and the heroism of such resistance as did occur; to inquiries into the relationship of the Holocaust to modernity; to excurses, postmodern in orientation or not, on the limits of representation; and so on. The diversity of interest in the Holocaust provides, *prima facie*, justification for a diversity of treatments. (Varon 104)

What may be new in contemporary historical films on Nazism is that the diversity is located in the perpetrators' gaze over the subject. This is what the three recent films may advance: a different approach to the subject justified by the interest in the Holocaust perpetrators. As Russell Braun states, "survivors and humanists alike argue that the Holocaust possesses an explicit moral meaning that should be represented in all historical narratives" (181); this means that these narratives must be looked upon seriously and with care, and not dismissed as simple big budget spectacles, or even as an irresponsible whitewashing of history. Although Hayden White's argument suggests that history is more about possible accounts than closed or absolute statements, the historical phenomenon of the Holocaust and the Nazi period, which presents us with several possibilities to represent them, should never be relativized. The acceptance of the most varied forms or tropes of representing the Holocaust, as Varon suggests, does not mean that anything goes regarding representations of Nazis and that the limits to it exist no more. On the contrary, what these films may advance is the desire "to redeem at least a remnant of the Nazi epoch in the history of Germany" (White 43), to set the idea that even in the heart of Nazism hope and solace could be found. Instead of becoming part of revisionist literature in the Neo–Nazi sense, formed by "a distinct group of writings that deny the facticity of the Nazi genocide of the Jews" (Funkenstein 77), these films may relate to an argument that states that "what is needed for anyone writing

about the Holocaust is an attitude, position, or posture" (White 47).

Wulf Kansteiner states that "Hayden White and Jean–François Lyotard have themselves considered the consequences of their theories for the representation of Nazism and the Final Solution" (166). White has proposed a structuralist system for the analysis of historical discourse in which he presents two levels of differences in historiographical texts, called referents. The primary referent of historical discourse is constituted by the events dealt with in the historical texts. This first level would be the historical fact considered as such. The secondary referent would be the narrative structures historians employ to insert these different events within general interpretations of the respective historical processes. On the one hand lies the historical fact, and on the other, the personal interpretations of the historical fact suggested by the narrative tropes used by the historian. White asserts that these two levels are independent of each other: "while the truthfulness of primary referents can be checked according to accepted rules of evidence, the truthfulness of the meanings conveyed by specific narrative structures depends on the interpretive, topological tastes which prevail in the scientific and social community" (166). History cannot be interpreted by itself and White gives an example that "even the facts of the Nazi past do not speak for themselves, for they can be successfully incorporated into redemptive narrative structures if the social context allows for that" (Kansteiner 167).

The possibility of framing the Holocaust from a redemptive perspective seems to be a possible way of understanding the choices presented in *Schindler's List* and *Valkyrie*. By portraying a German protagonist capable of saving Jewish people, or another who attempted to kill Hitler, these two films seem to rely on some possible idea of redemption, as they are narratives that are read as precluding some sort of generalization. Thus, the films have to be analyzed with care, not to lead to disastrous interpretations. For example, "in Israel, the Shoah has been sublated within the traditional plot type of catastrophe and redemption. In addition, the extermination of the Jews could be framed as a success story under certain historical conditions, for example, a revival of Nazism" (167). This example shows that narratives of the Holocaust could be used even as a Neo–Nazi propaganda, urging attention to the fact that

such revisions should not distort the historical facts. What is useful to remember is that history does not speak for itself, rather it needs human agency in order to produce sense and meaning.

CRITICISM OF POSTMODERN THEORY AND THE DISTORTION OF HISTORY

These many different possibilities of representing the real may have become one of the main criticisms against postmodern theory, which creates a particular form of revisionism or relativism that is so intense and absolute to the point where the real is considered so completely refractory to human grasp, that every discourse is possible, valid or acceptable. The postmodern struggle against history ends up by transforming it in nothingness; this could lead to assumptions that even the Holocaust could receive interpretations that (mis)lead to its total denial, bringing validity to despicable claims, such as those by Neo–Nazism. The revisionism endorsed by postmodernism would ultimately be problematic due to its extreme ethical relativism, posing that moral rights and wrongs no longer exist, as such judgments are based solely on social norms. This is not necessarily bad, since it indicates that our morals have evolved, as they change over time and are not absolute. It also acknowledges respect for different cultures and practices, which is a good and valid form of revisionism. The main problem with relativism, rather than revisionism, is that ethical choices such as truth, justice, right and wrong, could become relative as well.

Tom Stempel states that "White argues that historical interpretation involves the arranging and telling of stories, not the objective presentation of the truth" (162). The author argues that "All historical explanations constitute forms of fiction, White points out, and we must be cautious about promoting false distinctions between fact and fiction. There is no single authoritative story about the past" (162). When analyzing Nazism and the Holocaust through the lens of postmodernity, one must be aware of the problems of relativization and its limits: "the film scholar's enthusiasm for White's ideas about the relativity of historical truths creates another problem. It leaves open for discussion questions about the limits of such relativism" (166). Authors have "alerted fellow historians to the danger of extreme

subjectivity, to the hazard of claiming that since all truths are contestable, we can privilege none" (167). Denials of the Holocaust and Neo–Nazi authoritative claims about History appear to be a major concern proposed by contemporary historians: dangers as such "are illustrated in David Irving's attempt to present a sharply distorted view of the Holocaust" (167). Irving's is a British Neo–Nazi who openly defends that the Holocaust is an elaborate Jewish–hoax with the ultimate goal of creating the State of Israel, which is a common Neo–Nazi statement. But "if a filmmaker tried to dramatize Irving's argument, maintaining in a Hollywood production that Auschwitz was essentially a labor camp where Jews died chiefly from typhus rather than from planned extermination, observers would face questions about objectivity, subjectivity and judgment in stark form" (167). It is necessary to clarify that the films chosen to be analyzed in this research do not question the validity or the truthfulness of the Holocaust as a historical fact, and they do not appear to endorse even the most remote redemption of Nazism as an ideology. *Schindler's List* and *Valkyrie* do locate some German characters in a different light, when compared with earlier films. *The Reader* invites another reading, due to its problematic representation of the protagonist: Hanna Schmitz is not a rescuer or resister, but a Holocaust perpetrator. This particular film may indicate a limit to postmodern theory, something that will be addressed further. Historical arguments about the reality of Nazism as oppression and the Holocaust as a major crime against humanity is never challenged, making it possible to argue that "the postmodernist claim that all narratives about history are subjective and constructed would not excuse such a motion picture's fooling with the evidence" (Stempel 167). However, only a close analysis of these films and their mode of production will reveal the implied and explicit meanings imbued in them, which is the object of study in the following chapters.

One problem that may concern postmodern writing and its revisionist impulse is a tendency to present an effective denial of the historical referent's reality. Postmodernism would endorse even Holocaust denial and Neo–Nazism according to this view, and could "promote a debilitating relativism that permits any manipulation of the evidence as long as the account produced is structurally coherent, and thereby allow the kind of perspectivism that permits even a Nazi version of Nazism's history to claim

minimal credibility" (White 76). The Holocaust would become simply a matter of opinion, and Neo–Nazi accounts would be valid. There would be "no responsibility to the victims to tell the truth about the indignities and cruelties they suffered" (76). The films in this research propose a representation where Germans themselves resist the Nazi powers, but they do not seem to ask for identification with Nazi criminals. *The Reader* may allow some sympathy for the main character, but it never denies the reality of the Holocaust, the truth of accounts about it, or the guilt of the main character; rather it presents a form of explanation for her involvement, that is, she joined the Nazis due to her illiteracy. None of the films state that the Holocaust events did not actually happen, thus these films do not aim to be a relativistic discourse about the Holocaust. The following chapter will provide an analysis of the films to show their construction as narrative systems and how the Hollywood apparatus has created space for such perspectives.

Another problem to be on the alert for when dealing with revisions of the Holocaust history is the recent rise of "revisionist historians of the Holocaust who indeed argue that this event never occurred" (76), which signals the form of revisionism that is defended by Neo–Nazism and not by postmodern theory. This is where the limit must be drawn: "there is no question of alternative interpretations or 'revisionist' hypothesis" (76). Postmodernism "is mainly about interpretations and the many possibilities that surface from interpretations themselves, but not through offensive transgression or against at least some historical logic that can be found through the careful examination of reality" (77). Hayden White addresses these Nazi revisionist claims as "total lies" (77). The lie would then be perceived "when it denies the reality of the events of which it treats, and into the category of an untruth when it draws false conclusions from reflections on events whose reality remains attestable on the level of 'positive' historical enquiry" (78). Postmodern theory must not be used as an excuse to distort history, but to allow new readings of it. It seems to be universal among cultures that it is wrong to murder, to torture, to torment, to steal, to lie, all of which continues to be valid in the face of any kind of representations of Nazi Germany.

The narratives in the three films that will be analyzed in this dissertation do not seem to efface the reality of the Holocaust

or of Nazism; instead they tend to suggest a more complex view of the subject. Postmodern theory presents its value as a guide to the very complex questions proposed by such films, by allowing the existence of stories that may complement what is called official or national history. This is a particular form of history that approaches what is called a master narrative, precisely what postmodern theory criticizes. Postmodernism signals the crisis of such narratives, proposing instead the valorization of personal and micronarratives as better forms to understand the past.

THE CRISIS OF MASTER NARRATIVES

A master narrative is a central or greater story that lends coherence and shape to a series of minor stories as it also can be understood as a grand narrative common to all. It is "a comprehensive explanation, a narrative about narratives of historical meaning, experience or knowledge, which offers a society legitimation through the early completion of a master idea" (Childers and Hentzi 186). The master narrative aims to be a "global or totalizing cultural narrative schema which orders and explains knowledge and experience" (Stephens and McCallum 186). It would be a major story, encompassing and explaining other 'little stories' within conceptual models that make such stories into a whole. Postmodern narratives "will often deliberately disturb the formulaic expectations such cultural codes provide" (Bertens and Fokkema 186). They may be able to present a possible revision of it as a master narrative: "postmodernism is characterized precisely by a mistrust of the grand narratives" (Lyotard 166–167). Likewise, Mark Salber Phillips has argued that "the most remarkable examples of microhistory as a shift in cognitive distance come from recent studies in the history of science, where historians have turned away from grand narratives of scientific reason to emphasize the localness and tacitness of scientific traditions" (Phillips 129).

Jean–François Lyotard argues that the "incredulity toward metanarratives" (xxiv) is what characterizes postmodernism (xxiv), which was able to produce a series of disjointed discourses, aimed at pluralistic views of History and of sciences in general. Instead of the major histories of the past, postmodern discourse favors microhistories of more located characters,

sometimes anonymous or previously unheard of: "identifying with the great names, the heroes of contemporary history, is becoming more and more difficult" (Lyotard 14). The stories of the main characters in these recent films about Nazism may be seen as micronarratives: they do not behave necessarily according to the Nazi policies, and even if they do, they could be presented with a much more human, subjective face, instead of a stereotyped one. Their micronarratives, which can be defined as isolated events during the Nazi regime in Germany, may be able to serve as a way to understand the Nazi period from a more complementary perspective.

Narration, which is the chosen form to present these stories, is seen as the "quintessential form of customary knowledge" (18). Through narration, countries may give meaning to the actions performed by their nationals, meanwhile audiences may be invited to play and to be part of the narratives they receive: "the people are only that which actualizes the narratives; once again, they do this not only by recounting them, but also by listening to them and recounting themselves through them" (23). Narratives also have the power to "define what has the right to be said and done in the culture in question, and since they are themselves a part of that culture, they are legitimated by the simple fact they do what they do" (23). Since narratives present and legitimate their discourses, a discourse that leads the notion of German resistance against the Holocaust and Nazism itself may find its place in the vastness of possible interpretations allowed by postmodern discourses, escaping the master narrative that once suggested Germans and Nazis as part of the same evil, and propose a view of some Germans as potential victims of the Nazi system, at the same time that the films do not deny the Holocaust or the Nazis' responsibility for it. This appears to be the case with *Schindler's List* and *Valkyrie*.

The crisis of master narratives signals the multiplicity of minor and local histories: "there is no master narrative that can reconcile the tragic and comic plots of global cultural history" (Klein 276). The metanarrative of homogenization is challenged, and "the idea that we have escaped universal history threatens to become an article of academic faith" (276). For Lyotard, what postmodernism defies is a view of narrative as "fairy-tale, teleology, and metaphysics", as the critic "contrasted its reactionary effects with the liberating sophistication of critical

analysis" (280). Lyotard undertook a critical recovery that distinguished master narratives from local narratives. The stories in *Schindler's List* and *Valkyrie* rely on the mode of a local narrative that challenges the notion that all Germans would be altogether evil. The films seem to illustrate the main criticism against the metanarrative, viewed as institutionalized, canonical, and legitimizing. Postmodernism presented a relative notion that invests in several possibilities and interpretations, based on the vast multiplicity of local and personal accounts of historical facts that may not lead to one particular final or whole outcome. Postmodernism serves as a tool aimed at representing historical facts and comes "to denounce metanarratives and applaud the proliferation of local narratives" (284).

Master narratives and their truthfulness are questioned through the quest for new representations and reinterpretations. Fragmented identities and individuals are in need of new ways of identification; the quest for heroes, victims or resisters in Germany during World War II and the Holocaust, what is presented to some extent in *Schindler's List* and *Valkyrie*, may be one such new way. There is a crisis of narratives and a lack of stories, not because they do not exist, but because the ones that exist no longer satisfy the subjective and fragmented identities of individuals and because they lead to a lack of temporal orientation. The Hollywood industry presents a series of narrative discourses through its numerous films, and the grand narrative of German evil and crimes during World War II was complemented by these later filmic narratives. Such revisionist view of History may bring new perspectives on the role of Germans during World War II and the Holocaust. This exemplifies how postmodernism and its denial of master narratives may suggested "a rich array of new research themes" (Hagen 01).

Through new representations of Germans during Nazism in *Schindler's List* and *Valkyrie* there is a new possibility of recovering the role of Germans during the Nazi regime. There is the acknowledgement that the "incredulity toward the metanarrative, taking the term loosely to encompass all large-scale and long–term historical conceptualizations, carries heavy consequences for German historiography" (02). However, Germany's case is not unique, since most countries may have a traumatic event in the past. Germany's burden is one of representing its own history in other terms than simply the one

proposed by the master narrative, in which all Germans should be seem as Nazis. As pointed out by William Hagen, the crisis of master narratives, a term which encompasses all historical macro narratives, "carries heavy consequences for German historiography. But this holds for all national histories, indeed of histories of any sort, if it is true that any empirically grounded narrative implies both a larger historical scenario, within which alone it can be meaningfully thought, and a theory of causation of how and why things happen in the world" (02). Postmodernist theorists such as Hagen seem to suggest that things are less gullible and more complex than that: even if "a media–created Holocaust recollection of Nazi atrocities against the Jews has come to dominate the official memory culture and the self–consciousness of the intellectuals" (08), postmodernism crisis of master narratives signals as possible to present accounts where even Germans living in the Nazi regime were critical of those same atrocities, sometimes behaving in a different direction and offering new insights, without pretending to disrespect the victims' memories or denying the Holocaust.

THE READER AND THE LIMITS OF POSTMODERN THEORY

Many authors have criticized postmodernism as "synonymous with moral relativism and contributing to deviant behavior" (Yilmaz 779). Postmodernism has also been accused of harboring a "desire to replace all metaphysical and psychological generalizations with a social constructivism that is haunted by reductionism" (Altieri 1663). Criticism as these points to the need of finding some limits to which the theory could be applied without becoming something meaningless, or even offensive.

Despite the fact that postmodern theory allowed revision of important aspects of historically abused or persecuted peoples, such as Native–Americans, and that the crisis of master narratives may answer for representations of German resisters in *Schindler's List* and *Valkyrie*, as these are also firmly supported by history and considered as exceptions, a film such as *The Reader* may present a possible limit regarding the use of postmodern theory. Hanna's character differs strongly from Schindler and Stauffenberg. Schindler was a labor profiteer, but had a

momentous change of heart, that allowed him to save people, instead of killing them. Stauffenberg had some participation in the Nazi aggression, but never had any relation with the Holocaust and its crimes; instead, he was a frontline soldier who belonged to the Army, not the SS. Hanna's case is completely different: she was an SS overseer and took active part in the murder of three hundred victims. The film, as the book, manipulates the viewer into feeling sorry for her. As Frederic Raphael states, "the film tries to convince us that Michael's silence is plausible, or even honorable, when in fact its makers must know that Hanna could not possibly be convicted in the way that we are shown" (11). Illiteracy, as the cause that led her to join the SS, also drew strong criticism. Raphael argues "that neither in life nor, therefore, in a fiction that claims to be life–like, could the illiterate Hanna have joined the SS (21). Historian Michael Burleigh shares the same opinion; he states that "every recruit to the SS had to fill in a form nowadays held in the Berlin document centre/Holocaust Museum. Such a bureaucratic regime required literacy of its servants" (197).

The metaphor regarding illiteracy "could be valid if it established a possible relationship between Hanna's illiteracy and the Third Reich's moral illiteracy" (Wroe 04). Hanna could also be a replacement for the whole of German people and their supposed inability to 'read' the signs that mass murder was being carried out in their name. *The Reader*'s narrative and its character may fall into the micronarrative model, but this is not enough to exonerate or integrate Hanna's story as one of resistance (she does not act against Nazism) or worse, of victimization, regarding the way she is represented: first, as an object of desire; second, as a poor illiterate berated by her co–defendants; third, in the way her guilt is never fully represented, as her criminal act does not appear in the film.

Thus, *The Reader* appears to misrepresent history in a way to pretend that the Germans did not know what was happening until after the war, when they finally learned about the horrors that were committed in the East, thus raising the issue of the existence of a supposedly difficult struggle that comes to light with postwar awareness. Only then, after the war, the film shows ordinary Germans shocked with the mass murder, the gas chambers, and the industrialized killings, which are then brought into discussion in Germany. The metaphor of illiteracy is limited:

even if Nazi agents like Hanna were metaphorically illiterate, they could have heard Hitler's intentions and threats throughout his national broadcasts. Cynthia Ozick states that "after the war, when she [Hanna] is brought to trial, the narrator acknowledges that she is guilty fo despicable crimes, but he also believes that her illiteracy must mitigate her guilt. Her crimes are illiteracy's accident. Illiteracy is her exculpation" (31).

Postmodern theory and its skeptical view of official history must not be used to justify, understand or exonerate a character as such. Burning people to death does not require reading skills, and to affirm that illiteracy is something more to be ashamed of than participating in mass murder goes beyond the intention of rewriting history in order to excuse the lower rank agent, illiterate or not. While it is possible to understand the characters in *Schindler's List* and *Valkyrie* as valid exceptions of resistance, in spite of their glamour and Hollywood investment, *The Reader* makes a clear limit to postmodern theory, indicating an absolute moral relativism that must be rejected due to its effacement of historical record. Perhaps the value of Hanna's character may be found in the way the film has chosen to represent a Nazi character beyond the usual stereotype. But, while Schindler and Stauffenberg may be seen as German resisters, Hanna remains nevertheless a Nazi perpetrator.

MICRONARRATIVE

Historian Giovanni Levi defines microhistory as an experimental, rather eclectic historiographical method, which can be combined with different theoretical perspectives and applied on a wide range of subjects. The prefix "micro" first and foremost refers to the practice of reducing the analysis of the documentary material to a detailed or "microscopic" level. As he suggests, "the historian focuses on clues, signs or symptoms that may be perceived as strange, dissonant or simply trivial. The meanings of these clues are then interpreted in the light of their larger contexts" (99–100). Therefore, instead of focusing on a macro, pretensely complete, history about Nazism and the Holocaust, the recent films allow a reading where individuals may offer a different perspective of the German people, even if from a micro perspective, which is the case of the leading characters in

Valkyrie and *Schindler's List*. Although they were not capable of defying the Nazi system from a macro view, their roles imply that there was a form of German resistance to Nazism as well.

Historian Walter Woodward has pointed out that the microhistorical method can be especially useful "for gaining insight into the experiences of the underecorded subjects of our history, those who have left little traces from which much, perhaps, can be gleaned" (91–92). Macro history may suffer criticism due to the fact that it usually approaches the stories of great men and major historical facts. On the contrary, microhistory is able to identify the reinterpretation of the historical record, orthodox views about a particular historical event, evidences of such event, and causes, motivations and decisions taken by those who were involved; as such, historical revisionism allowed by microhistory is a continual process of developing and refining the writing of history with complementary views.

Carlo Ginzburg has spoken of the microhistorical approach in terms of the clue paradigm. The latter is characterized by a "minute examination of the real, however trivial, to uncover the traces of events which the observer cannot directly experience" (13). Ginzburg exemplifies with the investigative methods of the art historian, the detective, the paleographer, the psychoanalyst, the doctor and the hunter. In their different ways, they all interpret and combine details as revealing clues about what they cannot be directly observed. To the hunter the footprint represents a real animal which has passed by; to the doctor the symptoms represent a disease; to the psychoanalyst a trauma, and so on. As historian Georg Iggers writes,

> this method clearly breaks with the traditional assertive, authoritarian form of discourse adopted by historians who present reality as objective. In microhistory, in contrast, the researcher's point of view becomes an intrinsic part of the account. The research process is explicitly described and the limitations of documentary evidence, the formulations of hypotheses and the lines of thought followed are no

longer hidden away from the eyes of the uninitiated. (Iggers 109–110)

Thus, the revision of the historical record reflects upon the contemporary discoveries of fact, evidence, and interpretation, thus producing a revision of history. Such revision may well be what is represented in the recent films about Nazism, which, without denying the reality of the Nazi crimes, are able to complement historical records by exposing and problematizing the role of some Germans during this historical period.

RESISTANCE OF GERMANS AGAINST NAZISM

Stories such as those of Schindler and Stauffenberg were not the only cases of resistance; as they provide more comprehensible ways to observe the German people during the war, they may also raise attention to other cases as well. These were the subject of recent German films, such as *Der Untergang* (2004), providing a more complex portrayal of Adolf Hitler; *Sophie Scholl: Die Letzten Tage* (2005), about a German girl executed for denouncing Nazi crimes; and *Stauffenberg* (2004), about operation Valkyrie. A postmodern approach to the subject in *Schindler* and *Valkyrie* acknowledges the need to bring value to the micronarratives they present: although faint and ineffective, resistance was a reality, with most of the resisters paying with their lives: "approximately 77,000 German citizens were killed for one or another form of resistance by Special courts, courts-martial, People's Court and the civil justice system" (Hoffman 13). The author goes on: "many of these Germans had served in government, the military, or in civil positions, which enabled them to engage in subversion and conspiracy" (Hoffman 13). But these resisters were few, compared with the Germans who were supportive of the regime: "the German resistance was resistance without the people, and the number of those Germans engaged in resistance to the Nazi regime was very small" (Mommsen 255). Perhaps these exceptions to the rule are what gives value to the resisters' acts, and demonstrates the importance to recover stories like those presented in the films.

Stauffenberg may have been the most famous, but he was not the only military man to seek Hitler's demise. The German

Army had other few resisters, notably those who defended Holocaust victims. Albert Battel and Max Liedtke were army officers who worked together and saved nearly one hundred Jewish people in Poland, sheltering them from deportation to the Belzec death camp. Liedtke was the military commander of Przemysl, and Battel was his adjudant. Battel requested "that those working for the Wehrmacht be retained and gave orders to block the bridge over the River San, the only route of deportation from the ghetto. As the SS attempted to cross to the other side, the Wehrmacht troops under Liedtke's command threatened to open fire unless the SS withdrew" (Megargee 557). Soon after this incident, "an army detachment under the command of Battel entered the cordoned–off area of the ghetto and evacuated 80–100 Jews and their families to the barracks of the local command. These Jews were placed under the protection of the Wehrmacht and were thus sheltered from deportation to the Belzec extermination camp" (Megargee 557). Karl Plagge was a Wehrmacht officer, "who during World War II used his position as a staff officer in the Army to employ and protect some 1,240 Jews – 500 men, the others women and children, in order to give them a better chance to survive the nearly total annihilation of Lithuania's Jews that took place between 1941–1944" (Good 154). Sergeant Anton Schmid was a conscript to the Wehrmacht who, "as a sergeant in Vilnius, Lithuania, was executed by his superiors for helping 250 Jewish men, women and children escape from extermination by the Nazi SS during the European Jewish Holocaust" (171).

There was resistance from among a few civilians as well. The White Rose Movement and the Swing Kids from Hamburg and Berlin are some of the most notable cases. White Rose was an intellectual resistance group formed by students of Munich University such as Hans and Sophie Scholl, Christoph Probst, and Willi Graf; in 1943 several members of the group were caught by the Gestapo, had mock trials and were executed swiftly. White Rose members, especially Sophie Scholl, who was described as "a student and anti–Nazi political activist within the White Rose non–violent resistance group" (Scholl 114), became icons of the new post–war Germany. The "White Rose group was motivated by ethical and moral considerations" (Jens 103), and with the fall of Nazi Germany, it came to represent opposition to tyranny in the German psyche and was lauded for acting without interest in

personal power or self–aggrandizement. Holocaust historian Jud Newborn stated that "you cannot really measure the effect of this kind of resistance in whether or not X number of bridges were blown up or a regime fell... the White Rose really has a more symbolic value, but that'd a very important value" (Newborn 13). The Swing Kids' story was presented in a 1993 film starring Robert Sean Leonard and Christian Bale, released few months before *Schindler's List* and whose story appears to foreground Spielberg's film. The "Swing Kids were a group of jazz and swing lovers in Germany in the 1930s, mainly in Hamburg and Berlin. They were composed of 14 to 18–year–old boys and girls in high school, most of them middle or upper–class students, but with some apprentice workers as well (Willet 158). A Gestapo operation on August 18th, 1941, arrested some 300 Swing Kids. Many were sent to concentration camps: "the boys went to Moringen concentration camp while the girls were sent to Ravensbruck" (Fackler 04).

Even the SS had members involved in resistance. Kurt Gerstein was an officer who witnessed mass gassings at Belzec and Treblinka in 1942. He tried unsuccessfully to warn Pope Pius XII in an effort to inform the public about the Holocaust, and wrote a witness report in 1945, where he states: "I joined the SS acting as an agent of the Confessing Church" (Friedländer 215). His story was presented in the 2002 film *Amen*, directed by Costa Gavras. Christopher Browning attests to the veracity of Gerstein's claims: "in the essential issue, namely that he was in Belzec and witnessed the gassing of a transport of Jews from Lwow, his testimony is fully corroborated... it is also corroborated by other categories of witnesses from Belzec" (120–121).

Georg Konrad Morgen was drafted to the SS during the first stages of the war, and later served as a judge. Assigned to Krakow, he investigated several SS officers for corruption; among those arrested under his orders was *Schindler's List* antagonist Amon Goeth. Morgen actively resisted the Holocaust, by prosecuting Nazis for corruption and delaying the killings in the camps: "Morgen claimed after the war that these prosecutions were an attempt to impede the mass extermination, and some scholars have found this explanation credible in light of the total evidence" (Studer and Velleman 54). These few recently recovered stories of resistance may indicate the importance of a

reading of German and Nazi characters that goes beyond the simple stereotype of the criminal monster, and the more recent films appear to promote that view.

STEREOTYPES

Stereotypes are "sets of beliefs, usually stated as categorical generalizations, which people hold about the members of their own and other groups. These beliefs are ordinarily oversimplified and seldom correspond with the objective facts" (Rinehart 137). The stereotype can be a construction given by a narrative, presented by it and dependent on it. Rinehart argues that "the act of stereotyping involves the attribution of a set of traits to members of social groups. They are described, for example, by their physical appearance (Jews have large noses); their intelligence (Negroes are stupid); or their personality (Japanese are sly)" (137).

Stereotypes are most commonly founded on the attribution of particular characteristics to ethnic or national groups, and they often are located around a historical frame that intends to endorse the reality of the process of stereotyping: "one of the characteristics of a stereotype is that it is often phrased in such a way as to attribute a peculiar set of traits to all members of a group. Beliefs cast in this 'all or none' form are based on the following logic: All Jews are shrewd; Joe is a Jew; therefore Joe is shrewd" (138). The same could be said about the Germans: many of the Nazis were Germans, but not all of them (a notable number came from Austria, as well as from other European countries, such as Hungary and Romenia); thus, not all Germans were Nazis, as they would not endorse or be involved in the Holocaust atrocities, which the acts of resistance of some Germans proves to be untrue. The foundation to this particular stereotyping process appears to be an overgeneralization that ignores the collaboration of other European peoples with the Holocaust, as well the resistance against Nazism by the German people. It is possible to argue that "while stereotypes may be based upon a 'kernel of truth,' truth is neither a necessary nor a sufficient condition for their existence" (138).

A stereotype is also "the act of making judgments and assigning negative qualities to other individuals and groups"

(Ramirez–Berg 14). It is "an oversimplified conception of a person, group or event," often based on a collective notion" (Silverblatt 58). The construction of a stereotype is based on the notion that an "idea or belief is fixed, formalized or standardized, and therefore perhaps false" (Hornby 847). In films produced during World War II and immediately after, with a very strong memory of Nazi crimes, all Germans could be portrayed as Nazis. The stereotype appears as a certain attitude towards specific types of individuals, and Germans are usually assigned that role: "Germans are frequently used as villains, depicted as either ruthless Nazis in films like *Indiana Jones and Raiders of the Lost Ark* or as cold–war era terrorists in the first *Die Hard* (Dahl 01–02).

It is possible to argue that "any real–life correspondence between a group member's behavior and a quality said to be characteristic of the entire group is only an isolated part of a much larger story, and usually far from the whole truth" (Ramirez–Berg 10). The historical context in which the creation and circulation of the stereotype appears also implies the need for a historical analysis. In film, stereotyping ends up becoming "the part that stands for the whole. But since any group's history is vast, complex, and variegated, stereotyping grossly simplifies that out–group experience by selecting a few traits of the 'other' that accentuate the differences" (11). Thus, distancing from the stereotype may give a richer understanding of the Nazi problem and its representation.

CONVERGENCE OF HISTORY AND NAZI STEREOTYPES

Postmodernism criticizes historical discourse, but not in an absolute form that would deny history entirely and distort the historical facts. Interpretations of horror, barbarism, evil, cruelty, even the responsibility for these are open to debate, but the reality of atrocities such as the Holocaust is not, and if there is one thing that clearly defines and identifies Nazi Germany is its gigantic constellation of criminal acts.

The main organization behind the Holocaust atrocities was the SS. Its members controlled all death and concentration camps; one of them was Sobibor. *Escape From Sobibor* is based on two autobiographical survivors' books. All the available literature

about the camp agree about the violence and brutality of the Nazi officials, especially Gustav Wagner, the main antagonist in the film. The film also clearly depicts the arrival of trains, the selection of workers, and the extermination in the gas chamber. In this camp, the Nazis "were responsible for the deaths of about 250,000 people" (Eberhardt and Owsinski 124). Represented by the end of the film, the escape sequence matches closely the statements of survivors Thomas Blatt and Stanislaw Szmajner, who are also main characters in the film. The SS was also a large military branch that fought throughout the war. There, they quickly received a reputation for crime, behaving with immense ruthlessness and violence against prisoners of war and civilians alike.

After the war, the SS was to become a symbol of Nazi Germany criminality. In the following years many army veterans made strong efforts to distance themselves from it, claiming the status of apolitical patriotic soldiers. But despite what is stated and presented in *Valkyrie*, the army was also responsible for atrocities against Jews and civilians. The army committed war crimes particularly in the Soviet Union and Poland: "once that officers and troops saw that murder was 'legitimate' in Poland, the effect was that the Army tended to copy the SS" (Bartov 147). Crimes against P.O.W.s were commonplace: in the invasion of Poland, "the Wehrmacht mass murdered at least 3,000 Polish P.O.W.s during the campaign" (Böhler 241). Rapes by soldiers were frequent: "thousands of Soviet female nurses, doctors and field medics fell victim to rape when captured, and were often murdered afterwards" (Datner 215). The Army was involved in anti–Jewish actions: "Feldmarshal Walther von Brauchitsch ordered when Operation Barbarossa began that all German Army commanders were to identify and register all Jews in the occupied areas in the Soviet Union at once and to co–operate fully with the Einsatzgruppen" (Hillgruber 96), the SS mobile killing squads. These few examples demonstrate how profound was the army's responsibility in atrocities. Its redemption in recent films such as *Valkyrie* remains a point of criticism, and shall be addressed in the moment to discuss the film's representation.

The fictitious doctor in *Sophie's Choice* resembles Nazi doctor Josef Mengele. Mengele was known to perform selections on newly arrived prisoners in Auschwitz; it is said that his behavior was very close to that of the fictional character: "he

selected prisoners, supervised the work of inmate doctors forced to work on them, and used Auschwitz as an opportunity to continue his anthropological studies and research on heredity, using inmates for human experimentation" (Kubica 317). Thus, the film's character could be understood as a representation of this historical character.

Women were also part of the SS, becoming notorious for the atrocities they committed. Maria Mandl was the main female supervisor at Auschwitz, participating in selections for death and other documented abuses: "she signed inmate lists, sending an estimated half a million women and children to their deaths in the gas chambers at Auschwitz I and II" (Lavern 39). Irma Grese "participated in prisoner selections for the gas chambers" (Knoch 219). Ilse Koch was the wife of the Buchenwald commander; she became infamous for being "engaged in a gruesome experiment when she ordered selected tattooed prisoners to be murdered and skinned to retrieve the parts of their tattooed bodies" (Shirer 885). The SS women are examples of the environment from which Hanna Schmitz might have come, as some members of the female SS closely resemble her representation. Nevertheless, such examples demonstrate that if all Germans have been stereotyped in film as Nazis, there are certainly good reasons for the process: Nazis' criminal actions are many, and well documented. These stereotypes are addressed in the followings.

STEREOTYPES OF GERMANS AND NAZIS IN HOLLYWOOD NARRATIVES

Germans were stereotyped in representations that portray them as a nation of Nazis; thus, nationals and ideological followers, without distinction, were perceived as equally responsible for the war, Nazism itself, and the Holocaust. The analysis of their representation in the recent films appears to indicate a more complex portrayal, perhaps due to their distance in time and space from the historical facts. Hollywood usually depicted Nazis and Germans as the same: villains and criminals: "almost any American, born in the early 1930's [...], could name at least a few vintage World War II films about the Nazis. Most of us can recall a Conrad Veidt, Erich von Stromheim, Francis Lederer, or Martin Kosleck performance" (Oehling 22). The

author states that even without recalling the name of the actor, the public would "certainly remember the villainous character portrayed" (22).

The interest in representing Germans increased during the war: As Oehling states, "in the years 1939–1945, Hollywood produced over fifty feature films in which portrayal of "Germans" constituted a significant aspect. Despite the number, most fell into three types: stories of German spy activities, accounts of Nazi occupation of conquered peoples, and portrayals of Nazi personality types and life in Germany" (22). It is possible to think that Germans were stereotyped in accordance with the United States' and Hollywood's political necessities to represent them as the enemies: "the German Nazis never show any human characteristics; they are ruthless and ready to kill whoever they need to in order to please Hitler" (Dahl 02).

The stereotyping of Germans happened during, and immediately after the war. But stereotyping could lead to mistaken generalizations regarding the German people as a whole: it is important to be "aware that something is wrong with American policy toward Germany. But there is little or no appreciation of one factor that may well have a lot to do with the failure: the prominence of stereotypes in our thinking about the defeated Reich" (Hermens 418), demonstrating that the stereotype has political and social consequences. Also, it is important to keep in mind that the United States had fought a war against Germany. Germans were the enemy, and it is much more dramatic to depict that in a film, which also gives a rationale for meeting unjustified violence (by the Germans) with necessary violence (by the Americans). Germans were to be perceived during those times in a way that "their stereotype is, essentially, an identification of the entire German nation with a fanatical, arrogant, treacherous "Nazi type" (419). The stereotype of the whole nation is connected with the Holocaust: "the final victory of the stereotype did not come until the spring of 1945, when the horrors of the concentration camps were uncovered to a world which had so long been unwilling to believe even the most definite evidence of their existence" (419). Due to the Nazi crimes all Germans, without distinction, were marked by their actions: "if a German was found holding his head up, he was denounced as arrogant. If he held it down, he was a whiner. If he smiled, he was trying to undermine our morale. If he held his face

straight, he was sullenly plotting revenge. If he attacked Hitler, he was a Nazi in disguise. If he didn't attack Hitler, he was a Nazi without remorse" (Hermens 421). Nevertheless, some few have resisted.

German stereotypes are analyzed already during the end of the war: "the weakness of German nationalism can be explained by the way the Nazis cut off the German people from their own history and cultural traditions. There was no German ideal, but a Nazi ideal; there were no German heroes, but only Nazi heroes, like Hitler and Horst Wessel" (425). The act of marking people with generalizing characteristics had its consequences: "the practical result of the prominence of stereotypes in our thinking about Germany has been to endanger the development of a rational policy toward that country" (426). Only during the Cold War did the Western Allies approach Germany once more, seeing in West Germany's territory the potential to create a strategical stand against the Soviet Union, and resuming their diplomatic relations.

As America's enemies, Nazis and their allies would receive a poor treatment in comparison to those who are to be presented as the narrative's heroes: "Germans and Japanese are usually one–dimensional monsters while the American soldiers are almost a cross section of a multicultural society." (Holte 105). Such characteristics are perceived in *Saving Private Ryan*, with its multiethnic squadron of soldiers. In war films Americans are presented as "the individual platoon, or crew of a ship or plane, becomes a melting pot, composed of a Texan, a Georgian, two urban ethnics (usually with Brooklyn accents), a Midwesterner, and a Wasp officer with a college degree, who put aside the differences which divide them to defeat the common enemy" (105). In *Saving Private Ryan* there is the W.A.S.P. officer, and four of his seven subordinates are Americans of Italian, Irish, Southern and Jewish heritage. If Hollywood has provided several examples of stereotyped representations of Nazi Germans, their narratives would not problematize the guilt Germans had to live with, a notion that *Sophie's Choice*, *Escape From Sobibor* and *Saving Private Ryan* apparently support and endorse. But in *Schindler's List*, *Valkyrie* and *The Reader*, perhaps the portrayal of the main characters in these films is not marked by the process of stereotyping. These films may indicate the existence of a more complex portrayal of Germans, given by those who behaved as

exceptions to the rule (Schindler and Stauffenberg), or acting in accordance to Nazi beliefs, is represented as more than a simple monster (Hanna Schmitz), all of them living under Nazi rule. Thus, the stereotype of Nazis and Germans in these second group of films deserve a rethinking. These films may offer a contrast with the earlier ones, because they may contrast with earlier stereotypical views, as the films give a more complex perspective of the German characters. This is not the same as to diminish or even dismiss the suffering of the victims, or to say that the Nazi State was not a criminal one. Instead, these films present the idea that resistance against Nazism and its brutality and horrors came from multiple spaces, even from inside Germany through some of its peoples, proposing an effort to rethink the stereotype of Germans in films about World War II.

HOLLYWOOD'S MELODRAMA

The films analyzed in this research are examples of Hollywood's melodrama, which is a subgenre of drama films based on a plot that appeals to the heightened emotions of the audience. This genre depends heavily on highly emotional themes, and the characters in these films are presented as living among threats, repression, fears and social pressures. The melodrama allows a character to work through his or her difficulties or surmount problems with resolute endurance, sacrificial acts and steadfast bravery. In the narratives presented in the first three films, the German characters commit atrocities and evil deeds, and are seem from the outside. In the other three, they are the protagonists and the viewer sees the actions through their eyes.

The melodrama structure of conflict has two main characteristics: one being the "presentation of conflict as a radical antagonism between value–weighted poles of good (or relative good) and evil (or extreme evil) (Desilet 105); the other being "the depiction of evil as a pollution of sufficient virulence to produce a strong desire for or even require violent destruction as a means of resolution of the conflict" (105). The drama divides the characters: those who are evil and must be defeated and the protagonists who fight them. Violence may be used in order to conquer and master evil, and to declare a moral statement

according to a certain concept of morality. This may indicate a desire or need to present violence in a domesticated manner, in a way that can be contained and conquered through the actions of the main characters. Violence does exist in the world, but the character is able to overcome it and to remark on the success of civilization:

> when combined with a violent resolution repeated endlessly through film and other media and reinforced by the concept of evil dominantly operative in the moral tradition, this radically polarized orientation toward conflict and toward an adversary results in a strong conditioning effect on audiences to apply a similar attitude to real conflict and to feel that it is natural to do so (Desilet 105)

The film's narrative has the power to bring the audiences towards the heroes' side, and to accept the use of violence as a justification for values such as freedom and justice. Evil characters, such as the Nazi characters, may be stigmatized and stereotyped in order to achieve the film's goal more easily: "in concert with the potent tradition of a culturally endorsed moral polarity of good and evil, melodrama reinforces in consumers a radically divided and partisan model of conflict in which adversaries are systematically devalued" (105). In melodrama one can witness and live an ideal response to real–life social and political problems: "cuts through the layers of complexity, dramatizes this truth in ways not normally experienced in real life, and thereby reflects and affirms the relevance of the moral perspective for the audience" (107). In the six films, the moral perspective is against Nazi Germany, condemning the Holocaust and Nazi political actions.

The protagonists' actions are given through the support of the melodramatic structure: "through the design of the melodramatic plot, the audience is led to identify exclusively with the hero. This partisan moral alignment creates an attitude of great tolerance for extreme violence when that violence is directed toward the villain" (111). The killings of Nazi officials in *Sobibor* by the Jewish prisoners, or those of Nazi soldiers by the Americans in *Private Ryan*, are matched with *Schindler*'s acts

of rescue and the conspiracy in *Valkyrie*, which are examples of that kind of tolerated, justified, or even necessary or domesticated violence.

Berel Lang states that "melodrama protests against evil and demands justice" (17), even if justice should be carried out through violence in search for a moral resolution: "the melodramatic imagination is profoundly moral; the melodrama does not simply stage a battle between good and evil (with good triumphing), but rather tries to establish that clear notions of good and evil prevail, that there are moral imperatives" (18). Melodrama deals with the pursuit of moral values, such as freedom, justice, truth, using an emotional format to convey this quest, a feature used in film: "Hollywood is dominated by action, spectacle, dynamic narrative, theatrical heightening and the externalizing of emotions – an inheritance from the traditional melodrama (of the stage, primarily) which was designed to arouse the same kind of intense emotional involvement" (07). The identification of Nazism with unparalleled crime, brutality, horror and violence, with an evilness that the Holocaust makes clear, is a potent theme to present as a melodrama which seems to be the structure of all six films. The melodrama is "tied to the conventions of realism, but distrusting the adequacy of social codes and the conventions of representation elaborated during the Enlightenment" (Gledhill 209). Melodrama sets out "to demonstrate within the transactions of everyday life the continuing operation of a Manichean battle between good and evil which infuses human actions with ethical consequences and therefore with significance" (209).

The six films present human choices that echo throughout moral and ethical consequences: it is impossible to have sympathy for a Nazi official who sends children to gas chamber, but this may happen when a German army officer defies such orders and seeks the eradication of those responsible.

A more gentle portrayal of resistance, which seeks the salvation of the victims rather than the killing of the oppressors, may stand for the same sympathy. Spielberg's two films under discussion here appear to follow both notions: the violent resister through war, performed as a moral crusade against Nazism (the American soldiers in *Private Ryan*), and the pacific rescuer that also embodies a spirit of morality and salvation (*Oskar Schindler*). Melodrama is thus connected to moral issues:

"melodramatic characterization is performed through a process of personification whereby actors, and fictional characters conceived as actors in their diegetic world, embody ethical forces" (210). The issue of Nazism and the Holocaust in the films is a prime example of cinematic melodrama: they deal with the immoral attempt to destroy human beings in the name of racism and bigotry, and at the same time, with the moral attempts to save and rescue victims from it; also these narratives of morality are easily accepted when performed by internationally famous film stars.

HOLLYWOOD'S STAR SYSTEM

The star system is the method of creating, promoting and exploiting movie stars: "stars are constructed by the film industry, but stars (although not all) also have a role in their own construction, participate in their own myth–making. Similarly, star status is authenticated by the media (press, fanzines, television and radio, and so on)" (Hayward 355–356). This may also involve the creation of personas for the actors, where they are led to perform similar roles in a series of films, a process called typecasting: "stars who appear to have a single marker are inclined to be typecast and provide rather predictable performances that make them less interesting as star personas (Harrison Ford, Keanu Reeves and Jack Nicholson come to mind)" (356). Leading actors are movie stars in many Hollywood films; their actions on screen are based on their status as celebrities, and help to "bring a powerful aura to their performance, making them the focal point of the *mise–en–scène*" (Corrigan and White 75). It is during the moviemaking process that types started to appear: "gradually, out of the repertory companies that each studio established for itself, types began to emerge: the handsome leading man, the flat-footed comic, the villain with his fine airs, the golden-haired heroine" (Knight 01). The actors that become stars "are known, loved, and revered wherever movies are shown. In our democratic United States stars are treated like royalty" (04).

The perception of the public personalities of these actors, the way they relate to the media, their public appearances, and very importantly, how this public status may be mixed with their

film performances come to define the star system: "the characters that they have created on the screen become accepted as an extension of their true personalities. (04)" The construction of the character through the recognizable film actor helps to establish this or that type. There are actors specialized in performing heroes, such as Tom Cruise and Tom Hanks. Meryl Streep is known for her dramatic and conflicted heroines: "if there is an interesting example of the way in which an emphasis on performance has worked differently for a female star is Meryl Streep." (Geraghty 198). The author states: "Streep's star status was largely based on performance – she resisted the use of her private life to turn her into a real celebrity – but the critical understanding of what was at stake in her performances was not always sympathetic" (198).

But her skill can be measured by her three Academy Awards out of nearly twenty nominations. It is possible to argue that "the successful actor is the one who can suggest on the screen a complete, living personality. Out of the thousands of individual shots that together make up a single feature-length film, shots lasting an average of only twenty seconds, there must emerge a single, integrated, recognizable human being" (Knight 04). Typecasting in the star system presents the recognition of the role that an actor plays best: "the stars, as professional types, are similarly incorporated by the skilled director into his narrative. They become 'plastic material' which he can shape and mold at his discretion" (05).

The understanding of what stardom means has accompanied film studies since its beginnings: "stardom has been a key concept in the development of film theory, and cinema has been the key site to test and prove stardom" (Geraghty 183). The problem of the "type" is meaningful. Audiences are led to expect how a character will be and behave based on the actor who portrays it: "the star–as–performer makes sense through the combination of a particular star image with a particular film context. It arises when we check 'whether an actor's presence in a film seems to correspond with his or her professional role' (Naremore 262) and often involves the star's identification with a particular genre" (Geraghty 189). Typecasting also provides a particular sense of stability to the eyes of the public: "for the star–as–professional a stable star image is of crucial importance. Too much difference from established star image may lead to

disappointment for the intended audience" (189). Tom Cruise's performances would be emblematic of the way the film industry follow this basic concept: "Tom Cruise, for instance, fresh from the huge courtroom successes of *A Few Good Men* (1992) and *The Firm* (1993), was a controversial choice for *Interview With the Vampire* (1994) because his image did not conform to character as it had done in the earlier films." (195). The author also remarks Cruise's evolution as a performer: he "attempted to switch from star–as–professional to star–as–performer. Although this is not a method performance, it is important to note the way attention is being drawn to the distance between actor and performance as a measure of the change in Cruise's clean–cut star image" (195).

But Cruise continued to be identified with the heroic types he played in *Top Gun* and the *Mission: Impossible* series. *Valkyrie* is another example of this typecasting. The stars of the more recent films are also usually associated with heroic protagonist roles in other films: Liam Neeson in *Excalibur* and *The Mission*; Kate Winslet in *Sense and Sensibility* and *Titanic*. For the public, the films may induce the idea that the real person is equal to the reel person strengthening the feeling of identification with the character performed by the recognizable actor. The star reaction to something in the film may produce a mimetic transfer of the spectator's feelings that brings him to identify with the star. The characters in the recent group of films here analyzed are presented not only with the aid of filmic elements, but also of the star system, helping to bring some symphaty to the German or Nazi characters they portray.

Stardom is a phenomenon that remains essential to Hollywood because of its ability to lure spectators into the theater. Thus, the star system is one of the most important stabilizing features of the movie industry. Certain stars can be used as an indicator as to the type of film about to be seen; some stars are indicators of a film's quality, because they may appear only in the best films. Stars as such can even have the power to tell audiences what to think and how to behave, what is right and wrong, and lead people to think about what they represent on screen via the roles they play. This may lead to a problem, which is the association of a star and a particular representation of a character in a film, and how the two interact. Such is the problem of actors known for their superstar condition when they choose to

play Nazis in a film. In order to fit the performer's persona, Nazi characters are somehow presented as sympathetic.

The viewers' perception of a film is heavily influenced by the perception of its stars, and publicity materials and reviews may indicate the way that audiences experience the film:

> There is a whole litany in the fan literature surrounding stars in which certain adjectives endlessly recur: sincere, immediate, spontaneous, real, direct, genuine and so on. All of these words can be seen as relating to a general notion of "authenticity". It is these qualities that we demand of a star if we accept her or him in the spirit in which she or he is offered. Outside of a camp appreciation, it is the star's really seeming to be what s/he is supposed to be that secures his/her star status, "star quality" or charisma. Authenticity is both a quality necessary to the star phenomenon to make it work, and also the quality that guarantees the authenticity of the other particular values a star embodies. It is this effect of authenticating authenticity that gives the star charisma. (Dyer 14)

This argument indicates the importance of understanding the star system's role in the production of the analyzed films. The presence of the star has the power to increase the profits from a film; they may contribute to add monetary value and to reduce the risk of the film's financial loss. It is important to understand what the actors in the analyzed films represent: their inclusion may increase the film's chance of success. To associate them to the characters they portray is to understand their importance in the cultural world, based on roles performed in earlier films. This is given through the understanding of the "persona", what the actor represents when he is "off film". A star may "dominate the action and space of the mise–en–scène, bring the accumulated history and significance of their past performances to each new film appearance, and acquire a status that transforms their individual physical presence into more abstract or mythical

qualitites" (Corrigan and White 75). The previous history of the stars, the recognition of the public, and their status of celebrities create the persona, which can be used to present and develop the story of a film.

The "Persona" is "a social role or character played by an actor" (Everhart 157). A famous figure in film "is filtered through the persona of the star image in two ways: inside the frame by the tradition of the actor's performance, and outside the film by publicity and public relations materials" (Custen 73). As the author states, "because events outside the film (the life depicted) interact with our responses to the actor inside the film, the meaning of this body of films is both multivalent and interactive" (Custen 73). Actors bring with themselves this persona, a certain "type" that alerts the public about the behavior of the character, and what can be expected of it, as part of the actor's personal characteristics.

Meryl Streep is widely recognized for her of talent and versatility. For example, her performance of the role of Sophie marks her ability to imitate accents and dialects when playing foreign characters. She often uses voice resources to create personas, such as the Danish character in *Out of Africa* (1985), and Margaret Thatcher in *The Iron Lady* (2011). Her films receive a considerable amount of publicity and important awards, cementing her status as a major leading name and superstar in the Hollywood industry.

Sobibor's main characters were portrayed by relatively unknown actors. Rutger Hauer, as Russian army officer Perchesky, was one of the most famous; before that, he had appeared in *Ladyhawke* (1985) and *Blade Runner* (1982). Another was Alan Arkin, who plays revolt leader Leon Feldhendler. The Nazi characters are performed by German actors completely unknown to American audiences. They appear in the narrative to keep a moral distance between the audiences and the characters they create, reminding viewers how evil Nazi Germany was.

Schindler's List and *Saving Private Ryan* are two of the major films of the 1990's, both directed by Steven Spielberg, who has been identified as a major director and producer; his name is connected with mass entertainment, and associated with some of the most recognizable and anticipated films. He is known for straight drama films aimed at critical recognition: for *Schindler*

and *Private Ryan*, he received his two Academy Awards. Playing the main character in *Private Ryan*, Tom Hanks is one of the most famous Hollywood superstars, completely integrated in the star system, usually performing likeable characters.

Liam Neeson's first major character was Schindler, for which he was nominated for an Academy Award. Films like *Rob Roy* (1995), *Michael Collins* (1996), and *Les Miserables* (1998) identify him with heroic types. He is also associated with "mentor–roles", the older character that guides a hero, as in *Star Wars: Episode I: The Phantom Menace* (1999), *Kingdom of Heaven,* and *Batman Begins* (2005). The antagonist in *Schindler* is performed by English actor Ralph Fiennes, a role that sealed his international prominence. He plays heroic characters (*The English Patient,* 1997; *The Constant Gardener,* 2005), but has been associated with villainous types in the *Harry Potter* film series (2005–2011), and *Red Dragon* (2002).

Tom Cruise is completely associated with the star system: he takes the lead role and personifies the hero type in his films and has sought to become a respected actor in dramatic roles. He received Academy Award nominations (*Born in the Fourth of July,* 1989; *Jerry Maguire*, 1996), and performed the hero in the blockbuster *Mission: Impossible* series. He is the main actor in Spielberg's *Minority Report* (2002) and *War of the Worlds* (2005). *Valkyrie* is another example of a film where he plays the hero.

Kate Winslet may escape the typecasting process, considering that she performs several kinds of different characters. She plays a murderer in *Heavenly Creatures* (1993), romantic heroines in *Sense and Sensibility* (1995) and *Titanic* (1997), and the Nazi in *The Reader*. Her performances of very different characters may help avoid typecasting, and her portrayal of a complex Nazi character may be part of such versatility.

The stars are essential to promote the film's narratives. Fighting the Nazis or resisting to them, these likeable and known personas represent a sort of morality and are heightened and highlighted by the actors' presences. These "moral forces are expressions of personality, externalized in a character's physical being, in gesture, dress and above all in action. Thus, since in the melodramatic regime, 'good and evil are moral feelings', gesture becomes a major link between ethical forces and personal desires" (Gledhill 210). It is possible to expect that Liam Neeson

and Tom Cruise will be heroes, and also that Kate Winslet is able to portray more complex characters. Likewise, unknown German actors playing Nazis are able to create a distance from the audience. Film stars may offer "emblematic and at the same time intimate personifications of psychic states and moral identities" (211), and the melodrama becomes the vehicle through which stars are able to perform their personas and performances directed to portray meaningful narratives. The melodrama is deeply connected with the star system and the personas these stars create: "if the excessive moment in melodrama infuses ordinary characters and relationships with excitement and significance, stars represent ordinary people whose ordinary joys and sorrows become extraordinary in the intensity stardom imparts to them" (213).

HISTORICAL DISTANCE FROM THE NAZI EVENTS

The narratives presented in the chosen films must be understood not only through film mediation, but also in terms of historical distance. The idea of distance may consist in one of the defining principles of modern historical method. As time goes by, the complexity of the historical fact may demand new interpretations. In the specific case of the films on the Holocaust, the distancing in time from the trauma could be seen as a possibility to recover from history facts and narratives that have been somehow forgotten. The retrieval of resistance against the Nazi regime within Germany could be seen as possible only after a certain period of time. The historical distance may have a central role in this shift: "historians are most likely to think of distance in terms of emotional identification and detachment – and, by extension, of the political or social loyalties that engage both historians and readers with their stories." (Phillips 128). The author states that "these affective and ideological dimensions of the subject are certainly important, and in many historical accounts – or for many historical audiences – they are utterly central" (Phillips 128).

The concept of distance may also be important to postmodernism, as it favors the production of micronarratives. Time progression allows for observation that shifts the light from what is termed official macrohistory and its major agents toward

an understanding of other historical agents' stories, such as businesspeople, the military, and groups lower on the social scale: "among recent historiographical movements, microhistory provides a striking example of the emergence of a new historical genre defined in part by distance – a shift in perspective made particularly dramatic when viewed against the 'longue durée' of the *Annales* school" (128).

Historical distance can be understood as a stance of detached observation that is made possible by the passage of time. Distance can also be seen as a category that describes a much more complex set of engagements. It may change the dimension and the quality in which a representation is conceived, and it also can produce new affective claims that are potentially possible throughout the historical account. Examined in relation to the many ranges of mediation that historical thought performs, temporal distance becomes not limited by the time frame.

In historical writing, temporal distance could be employed to be more than simply the standard passing of time. It can be enlarged or diminished according to many kinds of commitments and responses; it can feel longer or shorter, given its psychological perception. In this sense, it refers much more than the simple conventional understanding of an outline of events that is clarified by the passage of time, or what the historian's perspective may reflect as the historical thinking of his/her own time. In a broader sense, historical distance is not to be limited by forms of detachment or estrangement, but could be understood as an impulse to establish proximity as well as separation. Distance would refer to "a whole dimension of our relation to the past, not one particular location" (Lee 217).

Historical distance also refers to the growing clarity that comes with the passage of time. In this sense, "the idea of distance has exercised an important influence on how we think about historical understanding, elevating distancing and detachment to a privileged position with respect to knowledge of the past" (Phillips 20). The simple spatial model that perceives the past as a location with a fixed distance from the present can be replaced: the understanding of distance goes beyond objective, mechanical, temporal measurements, by bringing the adjustment of this distance, an adjustment of proximity and separation, intimacy and estrangement between periods, events and peoples that enters the center of historical writing. This may help to bring

the past into comprehension in the present, how people react and act according to their perception of the past in the living present. Historical distance is thus associated with the whole dimension of our relation to the past, implying not only that our relation to the past is flexible, but also bringing forward the notion that this relation is usually negotiated in the construction of history in the present. Historical distance is what allows new perceptions of some very few Germans' role during the World War II, as the resistance of these Germans can be retrieved and signal a new historical perspective of the event itself, in which Germans can also be seen as human beings who were oppressed by the Nazi regime.

Based on how historical distance works, History becomes a social construction that is therefore more malleable; sometimes, it is also possible that with new information, or new emphases on the existing information, there can be a change in how certain historical facts or processes are viewed and told. Thus, historical distance may redirect our attention from history's contents to its structure and discourse. If it is indeed important to analyze the authentic contents of the past, which have long been considered of prime importance in historical thinking. The analysis of historical distance emphasizes the possible and the changeable constitution of historical time. Content and meaning in historical narrative are usually characterized by an essential differentiation between past and present.

Since there is a gap between the historical reality, that does not speak for itself but seeks to be expressed, and the many places where historical discourses are produced, historical distance appears to protect, sustain and justify new representations of traumatic historical events. The distance that is established between the real events that are narrated throughout historical discourse may help to comprehend how such representations come into existence. The distance between the events and the narratives of such events, as those presented in the recent films, appear to indicate how historical distance works: as the events begin to distance themselves from contemporary historical perception, narratives like these are able to appear and find their places in film culture.

Besides distance, discourse is of extreme importance to locate meaning in representation. Historical meaning and intelligibility are created from temporal rupture, as well through

the separation that happens between the historical object that is represented and the discursive position that constitutes the representation. The relation between object and discourse must be regulated and maintained in order to bring credibility to the discourse and thus, meaning to the representation. History has been long considered as a very stable structure that denies or forbids temporal fluidity, or any random conjunction of historical moments. Its structure would be static; nevertheless, the concept of historical distance could challenge this separation, allowing for the creation of a different imagination of history. History thus may favor a plurality of discourses that are parallel and coexist, restoring the proper complexity to the historical reality.

Postmodern discourse favors this notion, since it may open a new ground for comparisons and dialogues between history and other disciplines or narratives, such as literary ones. Literary narratives are then able to be recognized as texts which may contain or be contained by histories. History itself can be understood as a cluster of overlapping and competing genres, "different in terms of their formal, affective, ideological and cognitive elements, that, in balance, shape the reader's sense of engagement with the past" (Phillips 213). History must be comprehended in its potential to draw attention to its forms, emotional designs, ideologies and cognitive choices that guide its production. Including literary or filmic discourse within the wider range of historical writing may help to explain the capacity of fictional construction not just to use historical material as a source of imaginative recreation, but to intervene and have a concrete impact upon the epistemology of history, considered in its dimensions of formality, affection, ideology and conceptualization: "Phillips understands historical distance to include formal, affective, ideological, and cognitive dimensions, each of which plays a role in historical representation, although often in varying degrees of intensity". (Hollander et all. 07). The author says that historical distance, then, "is not merely shorthand for temporal distance, as in common parlance, but rather indicates a variety of strategies employed by historians to achieve effects of proximity and separation" (Hollander et all., 07).

The concept of historical distance helps to understand temporality as something that is bound up with other relations that come from our need to engage with the past as a reality. For every historical work, some basic dimensions could be

considered regarding representation, such as the genres, media, or conventions that shape the history's formal structures (of which film is but one), the affective claims made by the historical account, that may change the implications for ethical or political action caused by each representation, as well as its favored modes of explanation and understanding. This can help the comprehension of the characters in those recent films.

The affective claim created by the historical account can suffer transformations; nevertheless, to study Nazism and the Holocaust is to search for answers in a deeply emotional scenario. The analysis of the Jewish people suffering usually holds an enormous emotional experience, as well as the search for justice against the perpetrators. Negative affection is usually displayed against the Nazi characters in such stories. It is also important to take into account the medium and genre that shapes the formal structures of representation of a particular story. In this case, the medium is film and the genre is the historical film. Both make use of a series of distinct elements that strongly influence the story they intend to depict. Likewise, new modes of explanation and understanding may arise, that can complement previous ones.

The process of distancing from the Nazi events in the representation that these new films inaugurate may be explained in part through an analysis of historical distance, which may have been influenced by the new anti–Nazi identity that West Germany governments tried to endorse after the war. The understanding of the historical chain of events in Germany since the end of the war may lead to an understanding of how historical distance is able to shape new forms of representation. When dealing with historical distance, it is possible "to use the term to indicate possibilities for making past moments close and pressing, in order to intensify, for example, the emotional or political impact of an event, as well as to mark the idea of stepping back from the historical scene, perhaps to emphasize the objectivity, irony, or philosophical sweep of the historian's vision"(Phillips 22). This device can be used in several forms of text and media: "as a rhetorical effect produced on the reader, distance can take different forms in various historical genres and traditions" (Hollander et all. 07). To understand how this works, it is important to observe how Germany has politically changed since the end of the war and of the Nazi era, and how it took an important political role on the international scene ever since.

All German governments after World War II strove to construct a strict anti–Nazi identity. West Germany became one of the major centers of the Cold War, aligning with the United States, which provided financial aid for the country's reconstruction. Germany was to be identified less with Nazism and more with the dispute about political, economical, cultural and social zones of influences between the United States and the Soviet Union.

The first of these post–war governments was headed by Konrad Adenauer (1949 –1963), an active politician during the Denazification years. From 1946 on, the Allied powers sought to identify peoples and groups that had committed atrocities and to start judicial action against them. During these years it was discovered that "about 8.5 million Germans or 10% of the population had been members of the Nazi Party. Nazi–related organizations also had huge memberships" (Taylor 255), making it impossible to prosecute and investigate everyone, which would make it impossible to create a functional and stable democracy. Those who were effectively punished were those responsible for the worst atrocities, mainly connected with the Holocaust. It was also important to keep the people's good will to prevent the spread of Communism. Though strong during the final years after the war, the idea of the German people's collective guilt began to fade: "prominent U. S. opinion makers had initiated a domestic propaganda campaign (which was to continue until 1948) arguing for a harsh peace for Germany, with a particular aim to end the apparent habit in the U.S. of viewing the Nazis and the German people as separate entities" (Casey 62).

During the Adenauer years, there was also an increasing desire by German's army officers to state to the Allied Powers that the army had not been involved in war crimes, and that the great majority of the frontline soldiers had behaved honorably. Stauffenberg could promote this vision in such a context. Nevertheless, he appears to have been an exception: the myth of the "clean German army" does not stand. In Poland, for instance, "since the beginning, the German army was involved in crimes against the Jewish population" (Pemper 28). Even the Adenauer government was not without controversy: "in 1950, a major controversy broke out when it emerged that Adenauer's State Secretary Hans Globke had played a major role in drafting anti–semitic laws in Nazi Germany" (Tetens 51).

German governments made a major effort to complete denazification, with close support by the United States. In addition to the political action, the Justice system undertook efforts to bring to trial those accused of participation in the Holocaust. From 1950 on, trials against death camp SS agents were held in Germany: the Belsen (Lüneburg, 1945), Treblinka (Düsseldorf, 1964), Auschwitz (Frankfurt, 1963– 64), Belzec (Munich, 1963–65), and the Sobibor trials (Hagen, 1966). In this last one, Erich Bauer and Karl Frenzel, characters presented in *Sobibor*, were convicted and sentenced to life imprisonment.

German politicians did their best to recognize the horrors of Nazi aggression and paid homage to its victims. Willy Brandt tried to improve German relations with the Soviet Union, Poland, Czechoslovakia, and other Eastern Bloc countries; a notable moment "came in December 1970 with the famous *Warschauer Kniefall* in which Brandt, apparently spontaneously, knelt down at the monument to victims of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising" (Kempe 375), thus recognizing the suffering and persecution of these Holocaust victims, and the Nazi responsibility for it. American presidents remained aware of Germany's role in the post–war era and the U. S. interest to be allied with the country, given its strategic location and geopolitical value during the Cold War. President John F. Kennedy gave his support to the country through his famous "Ich bin ein Berliner" speech in 1963; Ronald Reagan's 1987 speech "Tear down this wall mr. Gorbachev!", stood as a major symbol of Germany's importance as a political force in the world. Germany's chancellor Helmut Kohl characterized Reagan's words as "a stroke of luck for Europe" (Keyser 01). Representing this new Germany as the architecht of reunification, Kohl was described as the greatest European leader of the second half the 20th century by U. S. Presidents George H. W. Bush and Bill Clinton. But America's new political approach generated some controversies. Reagan's visit to a German military cemetery in Bitburg, as a symbol of reconciliation, provoked international outcry: Reagan and his staff failed to notice that among the soldiers buried there, there were also forty–nine members of the SS. Reagan tried to defend himself: "these were the villains, as we know, that conducted the persecutions and all. But there are 2,000 graves there, and most of those, the average age is about 18" (Moore 335). The President stated: "there's nothing wrong with visiting that cemetery where those

young men are victims of Nazism also, even though they were fighting in the German uniform, drafted into service to carry out the hateful wishes of the Nazis. They were victims, just as surely as the victims in the concentration camps" (335).

Reagan's statement was controversial, in the sense he apparently equated Nazi soldiers with Holocaust victims. The role of some German politicians was a subject of controversy as well. Kurt Waldheim was elected as the fourth secretary–general for The United Nations (1972–1981), as well as the ninth President of Austria (1986–1992), but he had been an army intelligence officer during the war: "much historical interest had centered on Waldheim's role in Operation Kozara in 1942. According to one post-war investigator, prisoners were routinely shot within only a few hundred meters of Waldheim's office" (Kandell 03). The author also states that this would happen "just thirty–five kilometers away at the Jasenovac concentration camp. Waldheim later stated that he did not know about the murder of civilians there" (Kandell 03).

Judgements against Nazi criminals continue to this day in Germany: Sobibor guard Ivan Demjanjuk was sentenced to death in 2010, and Auschwitz guard Oskar Gröning was considered guilty in 2015 for the death of 300,000 Jewish people. The historical role of Germans is extremely complex: there were common people involved in atrocities and in resistance, people whose actions moved the Holocaust forward or tried to stop it. Perhaps, this is why postmodern micronarratives can be used as a theoretical model to understand the representation in the recent films about the Nazi era, which also use historical distance in their affective element to make audiences identify with their main characters: "micronarrative allowed historians to pursue closer emotional and ideological identification with the experiences of women, peasants, religious nonconformists and others whose lives seemed to have been erased from larger–scale narratives" (Phillips 128). It is possible to argue also that "the preference of microhistory by postmodern theory also may enhance the quality of historical distance" (126–127). Meanwhile Nazi political actions remain banned by law, the memory of historical characters known for their resistance is cherished and remembered in several monuments throughout Germany and Austria. The memory of the Holocaust and of Nazism remains alive and condemned in Germany in the after–war past and in the

present, both understood as a continuous presence. Scholars such as Dominik LaCapra have drawn "on psychological literature to challenge the conventional wisdom that the past is over and done with. Focusing on traumatic events such as the Holocaust, he argues that the language of "pastness" obscures the extent to which traumatic experiences can haunt the present in conscious and unconscious ways. (39)". Also, "traumatic events are not relegated to a past that can be neatly distinguished from the present. 'Presence' rather than pastness is what characterizes such events" (Hollander et all. 08).

Historical distance remains as a key component to understand how representations in *Schindler*, *Valkyrie* and *The Reader* are able to appear. It helps even to create more humane and less stereotyped representations of Germans living throughout the Nazi age or of Nazis themselves: "for historians and their readers alike, the thick contextualization and biographical detail made possible by microhistory seemed to humanize historical writing" (Phillips 128). How these representations are created is the subject of the next chapters. They present the analysis of key scenes in the six films, and demonstrate how representation of specific German and Nazi characters are created by them.

CHAPTER II
REPRESENTATIONS OF NAZI CHARACTERS IN
SOPHIE'S CHOICE, *ESCAPE FROM SOBIBOR* AND
SAVING PRIVATE RYAN

This chapter presents an analysis of specific scenes in three films about the Holocaust. These films represent Nazi characters in the way they are usually depicted by Hollywood plot: the audience is never invited to identify with them as Nazi characters. Thus, they occupy the role of villains or antagonists. People whom they torment, mistreat and persecute are the protagonists or heroes. Culturally, Nazism is represented in these films as an evil force, an aberrant political system that marks the opposite of civilization. The message advanced is clear: Nazism is the enemy of civilization itself, and its agents are criminals that must be faced and destroyed. The scenes here analyzed demonstrate how these Nazi characters are constructed and presented. Further in this dissertation, they will be compared and contrasted to Nazi characters from more recent Hollywood films, in which the characters are given a certain degree of complexity, as the films' plots seem less divided between good and evil. This dissertation will also attempt to contextualize this change of portrayal, as well as the ethical implications involved in this change, and what seems to imply a revisionist view of the role of Germans and Nazi characters in Hollywood filmic narratives.

REPRESENTATION IN *SOPHIE'S CHOICE*

In *Sophie`s Choice* (1982), Meryl Streep plays Sophie Zawiatowski, a Polish woman working in the anti-nazi Resistance during World War II. She is caught by the Gestapo and sent to Auschwitz with her two children, where she is forced by a Nazi officer to choose which will survive and which will be sent to the gas chambers. During most of the film, the narrative develops following Sophie's life as an immigrant in the U. S. and her love triangle with two other characters, Stingo and Nathan. Later, her past as a victim of Nazism emerges to the point where she is deported to Auschwitz where she is forced by a Nazi officer to

choose which of her two children will be sent to the gas chamber. The film is directed by prominent filmmaker Alan J. Pakula. Streep was an emerging actress by then: she had appeared in Woody Allen's *Manhattan* (1979), *The French Lieutenant`s Wife* (1981), and *Kramer vs. Kramer* (1979). After *Sophie* she became one of the greatest performers of Hollywood. Pakula was famous for directing films such as *All the President`s Men* (1976); later, he directed films such as *The Pelican Brief* (1993) and *The Devil's Own* (1997).

Sophie's Choice does not deal exclusively with Nazism, but its story is deeply connected with the Holocaust. The experience and trauma of the main character is what actually moves the narrative and introduces the audience to Nazi evilness and brutality. The event to be staged to present this trauma is the "choice" scene, that happens in Auschwitz death camp, and takes place soon after Sophie arrives there with her children. The sequence is of enormous importance for the narrative, because it explains the main character's trauma. This sequence is the only one to be analyzed in this film, due to its powerful role in the film's narrative and its power to synthesize the trauma associated with Nazism in popular memory. The sequence, a traumatic one, expresses in its portrayal the evilness incarnated by a Nazi Death Camp and its agents. Elements such as setting, lighting, costumes, cuts and the characters' behavior will be analyzed in this sequence.

Arrival and Selection at Auschwitz

The *mise-en-scène*[1] takes the audience into the cruelty of Auschwitz death camp. Sophie, the protagonist, encounters herself among the shouting of German soldiers. The whole scene is shot in dark colors as it is, poorly illuminated.[2] It is night, and

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[1] David Bordwell argues that the expression mise-en-scène is used "to signify the director's control over what appears in the film frame", and it would include "setting, lighting, costume and the behavior of the figures. In controlling the mise-en-scène, the director stages the event for the camera" (145).

[2] Bordwell states that in cinema, lighting is more than just illumination that permits us to see the action. Lighter and darker areas within the

the first shot shows, from an aerial shot, two lines of prisoners. As they march, the audience is shown two lines of people separated by a railway line and by an iron fence.

After the first aerial shot, the next ones will always be eye level, closing on the characters faces, mostly shots–reverse–shots, following the conversation between a Nazi officer and Sophie. Amidst the conversation we have a few reaction shots of children. The first cut shows Sophie's young son crouching in fear, alongside Sophie herself holding her daughter, among lines of prisoners. Soon, a tall German officer walks among the prisoners and stands close to Sophie's right.

The dialogue is spoken in German language; he tells her, abruptly, that she is very beautiful and that he wants to have sex with her. The cuts alternate between their faces: as he speaks, she is very intimidated and unable to react. He also asks if she is Polish and a communist, to which she agrees with the first question and denies the second one. She desperately adds that they are[3] Polish Christians and not Jewish.

As soon as Sophie states that she is Christian, the Nazi officer returns and looks with distrust; he passes in front of her once more, with contempt, asking if she is not a communist, and if she is a catholic. As she affirms that she believes in Christ, the officer asks if it were not true that Christ said that the children should suffer to come to Him. He further asks her to make a choice: that she may keep one of the children, and the other must go. Sophie's reaction embodies the audience's response, as in awe: the privilege of a choice sounds as a sadistic proposal. As Sophie says she cannot chose, the camera shows her position of fragility: she is in the center, but the Nazi agent, who is taller, dominates the dialogue. He walks freely around her whereas she is lifeless, frozen, as she holds the children in her arms, the

frame help create the overall composition of each shot and thus guide our attention to certain objects and actions" (152). Lighting "shapes objects by creating highlights and shadows. A highlight is a patch of relative brightness on a surface" (152).

[3] Marshment and Hallam states that "acting is typically gestural, relying on particular movements to illustrate emotional states" (06). They also argue that "acting style and characterization, in combination with location shooting, are important compositional elements of realist *mise-en-scène*" (84).

camera, which is also static, appears to mimic Sophie's position of paralysis. Furthermore, the Nazi's face, which is almost always hidden, builds up tension with the sense of fear of the unknown. He is presented as higher than her; he speaks from above, in a position of superiority. He coldly asks, and the she answers in fright, as the girl in her arms. Her face is in constant agony and suffering; the Nazi doctor demonstrates always a calm and softness in his voice that remark his power over her:

Figs. 1 to 3: Sophie is forced by a Nazi official to choose one of her children

The sequence moves on as the calmness of the Nazi is replaced by the brutal order which tells Sophie to be silent or he will send both children away. The fast montage[4] alternates between both characters as he orders both children to be taken away, conflicting and tormenting her as she is forced into a choice: a soldier takes the little girl from Sophie's arms, walking away with her. Sophie is unable to scream. The images are accompanied by the girl's screaming, who disappears in the dark. The scene demonstrates the horror of the Holocaust and the evilness of the Nazis. Sophie has to comply with the evil order, not to lose both children. In this way, *Sophie's Choice* reveals the sadistic and dehumanizing absurdity of the Holocaust: it "addresses very real issues of enslavement by racism and sexual politics and of the erosion of the individuals' self–worth by abusive social institutions" (Lupack 92). This idea refers to what

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[4] Lutz Koepnick defines montage as "a technique that defines the very specificity of cinematic representation against other art forms, a method of expression and address that at once interrupts a continuous flow of association and incites the viewer to intellectual response" (73).

happens to Sophie when she arrives at the camp: she is immediately mistreated, suffers verbal aggression and sexual harassment. She becomes a non–person, without any rights, to the point where she is forced to deliver one of her children to die.

Thus, the film shows the Nazi State, which is a distortion as a political system through its systematic persecution, its ethical and racial oppression, as one is aware, of its systematic killing of millions of people. Besides the Jews, the Nazi State promoted the eradication of Slavs: historian Rudolph Rummel estimates the number of Slav civilians and P.OW.s murdered by the Nazis to be 10,547,000. The Nazis also murdered "between 1.8 and 2,1 million non–Jewish Polish citizens", who "perished in German hands during the course of the war" (Berenbaum 125). According to historian Ian Hancock, the Nazi persecution of Roma and Sinti people may have taken a death toll of "between 500,000 and 1,500,000" (383). Historians Wojciech Materski and Tomasz Szarota state that "Nazi crimes against the Polish nation claimed the lives of 2,770,000 million Christian Poles" (09). The murder of civilian people by the Nazis was commonplace; for instance, historian Geoffrey Hosking states that "the Soviet Union lost 27 million people during the war; less than nine million of these were combat deaths" (242). These figures demonstrate the horrors committed by the Nazi State, and help to reinforce the representation of suffering which is metaphorically embodied by the very title of *Sophie's Choice*.

The film, in spite of its awards and nominations, could be seen as problematic in its portrayal of Sophie's ethnic and religious background, as she is not a Jew, but a Polish and Catholic. But at the same time, the film acknowledges that despite the vast number of victims of Nazism were the Jews, this persecution was not exclusive: Christians, homosexuals, Jehova's Witness, Gypsies, Slavs and many other groups considered "inferiors" by the Nazis were likewise targeted, and in many cases, murdered, as the figures given above help to demonstrate. The film never denies the massacre of the Jewish by the Nazis, but creates a version of the Holocaust where Christians and Jews suffered the same, which could compromise the historical specificity of the persecuted peoples. The selection sequence is exemplary in its use of Christian imagery: the Nazi official makes a reference to Christ's suffering, as Sophie also does. The Bible contains a passage where Jesus speaks about how children,

through their innocence, will attain salvation and be conducted to him. The Nazi doctor misrepresents the passage, and during his exchange with Sophie, he uses it as an excuse to take one of the children to be killed. In her suffering as a mother, Sophie could be associated with Mary and the loss of her Son.

Thus, there is a Christian–like figuration of the Holocaust, as the choice demanded upon Sophie can be read as the experience of martyrdom. Thomas Napierkowski explains that at the same time that the film "as a fictional representation which calumniates an entire nation and falsifies its history, especially as regards the Holocaust, is particularly reprehensible, Sophie is a mind numbing mechanical symbol of the fact that Jews weren't the only people to suffer in the Holocaust" (76–86). Problematically, the film equates Christian and Jewish suffering in that particular historical moment.

The choice given to Sophie reveals the dehumanization of Nazism as one of the greatest forms of violence forced upon a mother: to save just one of her children from death. The choice scene is indeed "disturbing, not simply as an event in Sophie's life but because of the way the text seems to indict Sophie even while it pities her. Why hadn't she stayed silent? The question ties Sophie's voice to her victimization." (293). Also, it is possible to argue that "her voice is credited with the agency that betrays her, the agency that brands her with guilt. If Sophie is her own betrayer, to what extent is she held paradoxically responsible for her own victimization?" (293).

The possibility of sexual advances towards a Christian woman helps to address the Holocaust much as a human tragedy, as a Jewish one. Similarly to Styron's novel, the film foregrounds the suffering of the Jews in the hands of the Nazis as equivalent to the suffering of all. Myers' analysis of Styron's novel helps to elucidate the filmic sequence here analyzed. As he says, Styron "advances a universalist, even metaphysical interpretation, understanding the Holocaust as the embodiment of absolute evil, which threatened humanity as a whole. The Jews may have been the 'victims of victims', but they were not the only victims of Nazi evil" (Myers 500). Myers further develops the thesis: "in opposition to the Jewish consecration, Styron interprets the Holocaust as a universal human tragedy. Sophie suffers as much as any Jew who had survived the same afflictions, because Nazi Germany's victims were not afflicted for being Jews" (512). But

the author reminds that "under Hitler, everyone suffered: Jews, Poles, Gypsies, Russians, Czechs, Yugoslavs, all the others. Vast multitudes of non–Jews were also swallowed up in the apparatus of the camps, perishing just as surely as the Jews" (513).

Regarding the tragedy, the film is effective in showing Nazi evil and brutality, as Sophie's choice shows the absurdity of the violence imposed on her: Sophie is forced to chose, but actually this is not a real choice: "she is given only the monstrous illusion of choice. She is not a moral agent, choosing for herself among a range of options and through this action defining her character; she is the creature of the SS officer who reduces her 'choices' to two" (513). The idea of choice does not lead to deliverance, because one of the children will die: "it is meaningless to speak of 'choice' in this context. And that is Styron's point. The Holocaust is not the only site of choiceless choice known to modernity; it may only be the most exemplary" (Myers 513).

The Nazi officer's role is to function as an evil character that will develop the drama: "on the railroad platform outside the camp, where a Nazi doctor sorted out those to be gassed immediately from those to be assigned to slave labor, Sophie had been told to choose which of her children would live" (Lang 218). The Nazi character functions as the antagonist, being even more evil by forcing a mother to deliver her child to die. He is also represented as a sexual attacker and also misuses a Christian figure of speech. He makes the Holocaust more Christian, not exclusively Jewish, as he attacks Christianity as an institution and uses arguments associated with life to present a deadly purpose. The film acknowledges Nazi persecution against Christians: it is an established fact that "between 2,500 and 5,000" Jehovas' Witnesses in Germany were persecuted and killed in concentration camps (Shulman 20); also, the Catholic Church suffered persecution in Nazi Germany: "Catholic schools and newspapers were closed, and a propaganda campaign against the Catholics was launched" (Gill 57).

The Nazi officer represents the way Nazi agents are understood as evil and inhumane, responsible for the Holocaust and identified with the enemies of civilization. He resembles many of the race specialists Nazis used to exterminate specific groups of people. Auschwitz is known to have operated with a corpus of medical experts; the most infamous of those was

perhaps doctor Josef Mengele, Auschwitz's "Angel of Death". Mengele is referred to by survivors as the one who conducted many selections of prisoners, which would divide those who were able to work from those who were to be sent to the gas chambers. Those selected to live would suffer medical experiments. Mengele became notorious for his experiments with children: "he established a kindergarten for children that were the subjects of experiments, along with all Romani children under the age of six" (Kubica 320–321).

Based on more usual representations of Nazi characters, the SS doctor in the film is cold, brutal, violent, cruel and harsh. He could be described as an evil character. As Polish Christians, Sophie and her children do not represent any danger to Nazism, in accordance to its racial laws: they are not necessarily targeted for extermination. The actions of the Nazi doctor present the absolute arbitrariness of Auschwitz's agents. The doctor represents how SS personnel in the camp would have power over life and death over the prisoners. The representation in the film shows Auschwitz as a symbol of immediate death and suffering.

Sophie's choice stains her life forever, and is connected with her suicide by the end of the film. Forced to deliver her daughter to die, there is no more space for her to survive. The choice itself is an absurd, a mockery, a cruel play by a Nazi official who has life and death power over his prisoners. Thus, her suicide is completely linked to the event in Auschwitz. The choice also may be used to present how corrupt and absurd was Nazism itself, a political system without any kind of moral ground; the film uses Sophie's suffering to denounce the horror of such system. Also, the film leaves no room for other possible readings of the Germans during the Nazi Era. Germans and Nazis are equated as part of the same reality, one that defined Sophie's life and stood for her traumatic experience. In the film, Auschwitz becomes a major symbol to Nazi horror and abnormality. Other brief scenes in the camp, depicting the lives of the camp's commander and his family suggests that the Germans incorporated Nazism's barbarity as something normal, part of their daily lives.

The second film in this research presents similar Nazi characters, as well as the suffering and resistance of Jewish prisoners in Sobibor Death Camp.

REPRESENTATION IN *ESCAPE FROM SOBIBOR*

Escape From Sobibor is a film about the successful revolt and escape of Jewish prisoners in occupied Poland's Sobibor death camp. It is based in three literary sources: Stanislaw Smajner's *Inferno em Sobibor* (1968), Thomas Blatt's *Sobibor: The Forgotten Revolt* (1996), and the homonimous book by American author Richard Rashke (1982). The main Nazi character is the brutal deputy commander Gustav Wagner, who is shown throughout the film tormenting and killing Jewish prisoners.

The film stars some actors who had been seen in Hollywood films: Rutger Hauer as Jewish–Russian officer Alexander Perchesky, and Alan Arkin as the revolt's leader Leon Feldhendler. Nazi characters are played mostly by German actors unknown in Hollywood, such as Hartmut Becker, who plays Gustav Wagner. Other main Nazi characters are Sergeant Karl Frenzel (Kurt Raab), Lieutenant Johann Niemann (Henry Stolow), Sergeant Josef Vallaster (Henning Gissel), Sergeant Erich Bauer (Klaus Grünberg), and camp commander Franz Karl Reichleitner (Eric Caspar). Most of the Jewish victims are portrayed by Eastern European actors and actresses. The film has basically one set: the camp, with all its structures, shops, fences, and a replica of the gas chambers. The film also causes a sense of deep isolation, perhaps close to the one experienced by the prisoners. The only outside scenario is the forest in the surrounds of the camp, which appears briefly.

Three scenes are to be analyzed regarding this film. The importance is to demonstrate crucial aspects of the Nazi extermination system. The first scene presents a mass execution in the gas chamber of Sobibor. It is a presentation that aims to reconstruct historical research over how the gassing process was conducted. The second scene presents how sergeant Gustav Wagner, the film's main villain, coldly assassinates a Jewish mother and her baby son. This second scene presents the horror of Nazi persecution, which spared not even the very young. The third scene again presents Gustav Wagner commanding a mass execution of prisoners, using this time a firing squad. Thus, these three scenes remain as clear examples of Nazi brutality, cruelty, racial hate, and evilness as they leave no room for any positive

representation of the German people, as opposed to the main character in *Schindler's List*.

A narration opens the film to describe the camp as one of the first three Death Camps established by the Nazis in occupied Poland, and the first sequence depicts the arrival of new prisoners. The main Nazi characters and their cruelty are presented in this scene. Wagner will reveal himself as the most evil and brutal one. He states that any disturbance will mean death to all prisoners. Some of the Jewish main characters are presented. Leon Feldhendler is perceived as an authority between the prisoners: three prisoners who try to escape seek advice from him before the attempt. This first failed escape underscores one of the main themes of the film: the one of Jewish resistance instead of passivity. The scene features very fast cuts,[5] underscoring the frenetic arrival, and follows Hollywood's classical editing,[6] and presents other main characters: Luka (Joanna Pacula), selected to care for the Nazi officials' rabbit farm; goldsmith Stanislaw Szmajner (Simon Gregor) and his brother Moses (Eli Nathenson); Naomi (Sara Sugarman), alongside her hidden baby; tailor Mundek (David Miller); and shoemaker Ithzak Lichtmann (Jack Shepherd). Nazi sergeants Frenzel and Wagner do the selections. Those who were selected are sent to the prisoners barracks; the others will be sent to the gas chambers. The film divides Nazis and Jewish prisoners: the first group represents evil, and the second are the victims and resisters. There is one exception which is of a German–Jewish Kapo, but he acts in the same brutal manner as the Nazis do.

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[5] The cut is defined as a "break in the image that marks the physical connection between two shots from two different pieces of film" (Corrigan and White 143). David Bordwell states that "cuts are perceived as instantaneous changes from one shot to another" (219).

[6] Classical Hollywood films usually employ continuity editing. This process "gives the viewer the impression that the action unfolds with spatiotemporal consistency" (Corrigan and White 138). Several scenes can be arranged to create a sequence that orders space and time inside a narrative and moves the story forward. Through editing, the viewer has a sense of story and character development; the main principle behind the continuity style is that "each shot has a continuous relationship to the next shot" (Corrigan and White 144).

The Gas Chambers

During the film, Moses is ordered by gas chamber's responsible, sergeant Erich Bauer, to go to camp three and pick a silver coin, that shall decorate the Nazi's whip's grip. He is allowed to enter by an Ukrainian guard. Unaware of the camp's true purpose, Moses witnesses a horrid scene that testifies about the Holocaust's genocidal nature: a line filled with naked men, women and children forced to enter motor engine powered gas chambers. Suddenly, a young child runs off and an Ukrainian guard sets a large German shepherd dog over the child. The girl's mother screams as the dog tears the child apart, but Bauer takes a hold of her and makes her stop screaming. Moses' face is displayed in close–up, showing his horror and distress over the scene (00:34:30).

The scene presents Nazi Bauer's cruelty: being responsible for Sobibor's gas chambers, he is directly involved in the genocidal actions taking place in the camp. He allows Moses to return to his quarters, warning that he will die if he speaks about what he saw.

Fig. 4: Moses in the Gas Chambers Fig. 5: Rows of naked prisoners

The sequence is clear and effective to render the Genocide. The mise–en–scène[7] depicts two large barracks: a wooden one, where people undress, and a concrete one, where they are forced to enter to die. The secrecy of the location is absolute. A large

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[7] The film's settings "need not be only a container for human events, but can dynamically enter the narrative action" (Bordwell 148). The setting thus becomes part of the film's actions. The concentration camps settings in *Sophie*, *Sobibor* and *Schindler* are prime examples of such.

corridor, closed with fences, leads the way. The non–diegetic[8] music is tragic, evoking lament, horror and loss, and the sound is dominated by the victims' screams as the gas starts to pour in.

Returning to his quarters and with the knowledge of the camp's true purpose, he tells the others what he saw. Very distressed over the death of his parents and sister, Stanislaw swears revenge upon the Nazis, especially Wagner. Thomas Blatt is one of the other prisoners. As he arrived earlier in the concentration camp, he knew the camp's purpose but was unable to tell the others because of the Nazis' threats.

A Mother and Her Child`s Murder

A most disturbing sequence of the film presents the execution of Naomi and her baby. Naomi is working at the seamstress shop with the other female prisoners (00:38:45). Wagner arrives, finds the crying child, and prepares to take the baby to die. He is confronted by Naomi's pleas. She attacks and spits on him, who shoots her. The film's montage focuses Luka's face, while she hears the child's screams. These are silenced by a second shot. Luka's reaction shot is of horror, as she starts crying.

Fig. 6: Naomi pleads to Wagner Fig. 7: Wagner prepares to shoot

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[8] Diegesis in film is defined as "the entire world that a story describes or that the viewer infers" (Corrigan and White 229). Characters, places and events presented in the narrative are all part of the diegesis. According to David Bordwell, diegesis is, "in a narrative film, the world of the film's story. The diegesis includes events that are presumed to have occurred and actions and spaces not shown onscreen" (478).

The cuts are very fast, and alternate between Wagner and Naomi. He first tries to force her to deliver the baby and states that he allows her to live because he is in good mood. Naomi and the baby killings happen off scene. There is only the sound of the two shots, connected with reaction shots of other prisoners. The theme of resistance is presented once more: Naomi also calls Wagner a "Nazi bastard". The Jewish people represented through Naomi is one of reasoning but one that can also be able to revolt, to defend their families, as they present a stiff resistance even in face of death.

Mass Execution at Sobibor

Another sequence in the film which illustrates the sadistic horror created by the Nazis is the execution of thirteen Jewish prisoners: it starts with thirteen victims about to be executed in front of the whole camp inmates; they are in line, badly beaten, their miserable figures contrasting with the impeccable shape of the Nazis' uniforms. The sequence begins (00:48:50) with an establishing shot that presents the death camp's main square. It is daytime and natural light is used; the camera maintains eye level. The first shot shows the victims, and the montage first intercuts rapidly between their front and back. Then, three planes are shown: the first is the victim's frontal; there are two SS guards preparing a machine gun to open fire in the second plane ahead of them; yet deeper, there is a third plane, consisting of the prisoners gathered to witness the execution. Another shot that is intercut with the previous one is of four SS Nazi officers awaiting alongside a Jewish kapo, thus giving a sense of suspense of what is about to happen.

Wagner controls the whole scene: he is first shown from a distance, and as he moves towards the camera, he soon dominates the entire frame (00:49:08). He orders everyone to stand up and explains that the reason for the mass killing is the attempted escape. Now in the first plane of the image, he states that there will be no other attempts in the camp. His words are intercut with the prisoners reaction of terror.

Figs. 8 and 9: Sergeant Gustav Wagner commands an execution of prisoners

Wagner also orders the prisoners to select thirteen other prisoners to be their companions to die (00:49:58). Resistance is presented once more: the victims refuse to select. Wagner grabs one of them, and forces him to choose; an elderly grey–haired man states that no one of them will do such thing. As Wagner moves behind the victims and he states that, if such refusal continues, he will select fifty prisoners. The victims finally comply and choose. The grey–haired man is the last to do so. The nobility of the victims is demonstrated by the fact that they do not choose any women.

The next shot is the same one that starts the sequence (00:53:04): twenty–six victims are shown with a frontal shot. Wagner states that if he sees someone turning his/her face away or closing eyes, this person will also be killed. He stops on the left of a female prisoner, and uses his whip under her chin to force her head up to witness the execution (00:53:35). Wagner himself is not willing to witness the execution. He orders another SS to command the killings (00:53:51). The scene cuts to the two SS soldiers with the machine gun, as they both kneel in the first plane; the victims in this image are on second plane, deeper in the frame. A brief silence evokes huge suspense; the grey–haired man screams demanding revenge. The machine gun opens fire and the victims are hit. The killing scene is rapidly intercut with the faces of several other prisoners showing their horror. Wagner dismisses them back to work. The sequence illustrates the daily horror that the prisoners are forced to endure. It also foregrounds the criminality of Nazism. Furthermore, the sequence also

advances the idea that the Jewish are able to resist: "to deny the execution of an order or simply to look a fellow prisoner in the eyes were already, for the camp's universe, acts of heroism. To care about another, to have someone to dedicate himself to, were among most popular of the daily virtues among the prisoners" (Poggi 09).

The execution of the thirteen prisoners leads Leon to plan an escape to free all inmates of Sobibor. A concrete plan to escape arrives alongside a platoon of Russian Jewish soldiers, when Lieutenant Alexander Perchesky is introduced (00:57:06). Leon recruits Perchesky to the underground, and the Russian presents the idea to kill the Nazis, rendering the Ukrainian guards leaderless. Meanwhile, Wagner and commander Reichleitner leave the camp for a three–day absence. The plan takes shape: the prisoners will cut telephone wires, sabotage vehicles, steal weapons, and lead the prisoners through the main gate into the forest. This should happen close to nightfall, which would forbid the Nazis from a pursuit, badly equipped for nocturnal searches. Thus, knives and axes are manufactured inside one shop and distributed to the prisoners (01:21:40). The Russian soldiers will perform most of the killings. Making use of the Nazis punctuality and greed, the prisoners devise a plan to lure them into the shops and kill them once they are inside: Ukrainian corporal Ivan Klatt and four SS, sergeants Josef Wolf, Josef Vallaster and Rudolf Beckmann, as well as lieutenant Johann Niemann, are killed.

As the plan develops, one Ukrainian alerts sergeant Bauer about the discovery of Niemann and Vallaster's bodies inside the shoemaker's shop, and Frenzel discovers Beckmann's body. Bauer stars to fire his pistol upon some Jewish workers. Leon climbs to the top of a wooden box and addresses the others: "those of you who survive bear witness! Tell the world what happened here!" A plongée shot starts the escape sequence. The music[9] glorifies the ensuing battle between the prisoners and the Ukrainians; several of these are surrounded and killed by the prisoners. The editing of the scene is also frenetic: it presents the hurry of the prisoners trying to escape alive. Bauer and Frenzel are able to fire at some prisoners, but the escape is out of control.

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[9] Music is "a crucial element in the film experience; among a range of other effects, it provides rhythm and deepens emotional response" (Corrigan and White 193).

The prisoners were able to trick the Nazis and escape to the forest, dodging the guards' bullets and the minefield around the camp. A brief epilogue states the fate of the surviving characters and the Nazis: Bauer and Frenzel were convicted to life imprisonment; and sergeant Wagner was found in São Paulo and died in 1980, in an apparent suicide. Finally, the last scene of the film presents the camp burning, devastated and emptied. Nazi leader Heinrich Himmer ordered the camp's destruction to conceal the crimes, and pines were planted. The film ends with an image of the statue honoring the prisoners, with the names of living survivors.

Sobibor was a major death camp in occupied Poland, and part of the main stage of Hitler's Final Solution: "several historians agree that the camp killed about 250,000 people, all Jewish" (Rashke 340). The film's sources, based also on survivors' testimonies, bestow a very strong sense of authenticity presented by first–hand witnesses. Since there are very few survivors, these reports are the only accounts of the camp's daily life and offer an extraordinary insight to the daily reality of the Holocaust. The film itself was produced around the same time of *Sophie's Choice*, thus being one of the films that suggested the renewed interest in Holocaust stories. In *Escape From Sobibor*, Rashke's book states that the film was met with acclaim throughout the world (340). In the United States, around 31,6 million people watched the film (340). The film could also be understood as a portrayal of Poland's suffering and resistance against the Nazi invaders. However, the film's effect in Ukraine was somehow less hailed: "a committee of the Ukrainian Congress sued CBS and Chrysler Corporation, that sponsored the film, stating that these companies had used the show in a badly manner as a vehicle to launch an unprecedented attack, prejudiced and deceitful against the Ukrainians and their country" (341). Representing them as mercenaries and traitors, the film reminded the role undertaken by some Ukrainians nationals, prompting the notion of collaborationism, not only in war combat, but also with the Holocaust. The film depicts the Ukrainians as equals to the Nazis. They are Anti–Semites, cruel, evil people, directly involved in the Holocaust processes: taking the victims away to the gas chambers, taking part in the killings, resisting against the prisoners during the escape moments, even when most Nazis are already dead. The first guard to die in the

film is an Ukrainian, and the status of these collaborators is never mitigated: they comply with the Nazi's orders without question; sergeant Bauer is informed of Niemman and Vallaster's deaths by an Ukrainian guard.

Based on survivors' reports, the film presents no space for relativism. All Nazi characters in the film are deeply involved in the Holocaust and in several acts of atrocities. Thomas Blatt names at least sixty–one Nazi officials directly connected to the events that have taken place in Sobibor (43–44). He often names the perpetrators and points to their personal responsibility: "established by Wagner and Frenzel, the penal group consisted of prisoners who had committed some infraction and were destined to die from the start" (54). Blatt states that Wagner was the very worst Nazi in the camp: "his cruelty had no bounds; he killed at the slightest pretext" (54). In the film, as we have seen, Wagner executes a child and a mother, as well as the prisoners after the failed attempt escape scene: "Wagner would shoot at women and children on their way to the gas chambers" (55).

The film is important because it presents an account of the daily life inside a death camp, thus differentiating itself from newsreels produced when the camp was liberated, and also because it deals with the issue of resistance. Resistance to oppression and evil, the pursuit of freedom, and also the denouncing of Nazism as a brutal system. In spite of all the filmic forms of representation, resistance and escape formed the core of the persecuted Jewish identity at Sobibor: "a woman that was being sent to the gas chambers was able to throw a heavy bottle at Lieutenant Niemman that cut the Nazi's scalp" (Blatt 59). "The plan began precisely at 4:00 p. m." (12). Wagner and commander Reichleitner were absent; the acting commander and higher–ranking Nazi in the camp was Niemann, so it was decided that he should be the first to be killed. The difference between book and film reveals the latter as an aesthetic work of art, that interprets history through its own narrativity. In Blatt's narrative, sergeants Siegfried Greischutz, Walter Ryba and Friedrich Gaulstich, which do not appear in the film, are also killed. Sergeants Wolf, Vallaster and Beckmann are killed in the manner represented in the film. On an average basis, during the killing hour until roll call at 5 p. m., "one German was killed on the average of every six minutes" (84) a remarkable feat considering the condition of the prisoners. Therefore, the action that prompted the escape was

represented in the film with great authenticity: an Ukrainian warned sergeant Bauer that sergeant Beckmann was dead in his office. Blatt also states that Szmajner participated in the shooting, being "able to silence the guard in the tower" (88).

Rashke's book is written from Blatt's and Szmajner's memories. He marks Wolf as "the first Nazi to die" (201), followed by Niemann (204). Some gruesome details about the later's death are ommited from the film. The film's domestication of violence serves in this case to create an account of Jewish heroism and greatness when faced with Nazi evilness. In the film, Niemman is knifed to death; all survivors testimonies state that Niemann was killed with an axe blow to the head. Another Jewish prisoner mutilated Niemann's body with a pair of scissors and had to be restrained. (Rashke 206; Schelvis, 162) In Rashke's account Vallaster and then Greischutz were killed afterwards. The Ukrainian Klatt and Beckmann are the last ones to die, and Bauer's actions are the same: he is informed of Vallaster's death and starts to shoot and scream. The accounts show the difficulties to create a historical reconstruction. Survivor Jules Schelvis gives a completely different order to the killings. In his account, the Nazi are killed in the following order: Niemann, Greischutz, Ukrainian Klatt, Vallaster, Wolf and Beckmann. Fritz Conrad and Thomas Stefll are two other Nazis that were killed and never appear in the film. In Rashke's *Escape From Sobibor* the actual escape is narrated in no more than two pages (213–214), despite consisting in the film's climax. The Ukrainians' resistance against the prisoners is more of a Hollywood spectacle. Survivors such as Stanislaw Szmajner and Julius Schelvis testify that the guards were leaderless (275; 164). Only when Frenzel arrived with a machine gun (as in the film), did the Ukrainians start to fire. By then, most of the prisoners were already outside the camp.

The film presents the escape as the pinacle of Jewish resistance and ignores the aftermath. About three hundred prisoners were able to escape alive, but a few survived: "fifty–eight were able to survive the course of the war" (Blatt 120), "less than fifty men and women" to survive the escape (Rashke 268), "forty-seven" (Schelvis 168), while Szmajner never gives a particular number. Nevertheless, the act of resistance was outstanding. Erich Bauer testified in his trial that about twenty–three Nazis and Ukrainians were killed during the revolt (Blatt

94). The Germans arrested twenty–five Ukrainians guards after the revolt, as they killed a German SS called Herbert Floss (94).

All survivors' reports mention a post–escape period when the former prisoners were forced to wander in the Polish countryside and seek refuge or aid: "for the Jews who had escaped, the next few weeks were terrifying" (Blatt 95). The Nazis began a massive hunt, and the escapees had reasons to fear Polish nationals in the face of collaborationism. The film's epilogue briefly mentions that Blatt himself alongside other two prisoners were shot by a Polish farmer that sought to steal their money: "I heard the pistol shot and felt the sharp, burning bite of a bullet under my jaw" (115).

The film's impact in Poland was "immediate and complete" (Rashke 340), depicting a tragedy that was Jewish but likewise Polish. To discuss Polish collaborationism and omission would be something sensitive and the film does not touch this theme: "the general conditions in occupied Poland and the hostile, anti–Semitic attitude of a sizeable segment of the Polish population provided formidable obstacles to survival" (Blatt 112). There was a Catholic man from Blatt's native town of Izbica "who was a pillar of the church before the war. When the Nazis proclaimed that it was no crime to kill Jews, the devout Catholic killed hundreds of Jews, including women and children" (Rashke 329).

Anti–Semitism was a fact in Poland, something that the film never touches. The film was released in 1987, by the time Lech Walesa led the Solidarity party against the Soviet–backed Polish government, demanding changes and political freedom. Poland was an anti–Soviet nation, thus aligning itself with Reagan's administration. The Jewish prisoners in the film were also Polish nationals, and a representation where both Jews and Poles were depicted as victims was better suited for the political needs of such times. Both *Sophie's Choice* and *Escape From Sobibor* are films able to depict and remember that the Nazi crimes, although centered against the Jewish populations, also victimized millions of Polish nationals.

The Nazi aggression could then be compared with the enduring Soviet Communist oppression; anti–Semitism is depicted as a Germanic characteristic probable absent in Polish nationals. The film's epilogue makes a few comments and acknowledges the existence of some "hostile Polish". Indeed, in

some instances, for example, Polish nationals "engaged in racketeering, blackmail and extortions inside the Warsaw Ghetto" (Gutman 90). But these were the exception: "The Polish resistance movement in World War II in German–occupied Poland was the largest resistance movement in all of occupied Europe" (Davies 344).

The film can be contextualized during the fall of Communism in Eastern European countries, and the Jewish–Polish victims can be identified with the American people: they are not only the innocent victims of Nazi horror, but their history is also one of resistance and fight for freedom and survival. The narrative in the film, thus, resembles Polish struggle for liberation from the Communist regime, a subject of interest to Hollywood and to Western civilization as well. Since Ukraine was still part of the Soviet Union, the film's identification between the Ukrainian guards and Nazism seems to be justified by the fact that, unlike Poland in the 1980s, Ukraine was far from a sympathetic view for the West due to its ties with Communism.

Wagner is a villain as all the other Nazis in the film. Nevertheless, he is an historical character, commonly mentioned in the survivor's narratives. Other Nazi characters in the film are mentioned in historical sources and survivor accounts, but Wagner is always recognized the very worst of them all. They agree that Wagner was extremely brutal, cruel, with an extreme likeness for murder. Camp commander Franz Reichleitner is historical but also a composite character. Reichleitner was Sobibor's second commander, replacing Franz Stangl, who was sent to command Treblinka.

Szmajner's book about Sobibor strongly features Wagner's brutal and inhuman character. He is one of the main Jewish characters in the film, and describes Wagner as gigantic, who roared to the prisoners instead of speaking to them (117, my translation).[10] He recognizes Wagner's responsibility by identifying him as "one of the main authorities, leader of Camp 1" (124, my translation).[11] Wagner constantly worked Szmajner as a slave due to the prisoner's talent as a goldsmith. The author describes several moments of the SS agents' cruelty, usually

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[10] gigantesco, que rugia aos prisioneiros aos invés de falar com eles (Szmajner 117)

[11] "Uma das principais autoridades, líder do Campo 1" (Szmajner 124)

highlighting Wagner's talent as a homicide, which nearly killed him: in one occasion "Wagner was already in the process of leading Szmajner to the gas chambers because another prisoner had revealed his knowledge of Szmajner's work" (Arad 162). Thomas Blatt and Julius Selvis also frequently mention the fear that Wagner caused among the prisoners, and how he was able to kill someone on a daily basis: Blatt wrote about a severe whip beating that Wagner gave him, consisting of twenty five lashes (132).

Richard Rashke also registers Wagner's brutal demeanor towards Jewish prisoners: "Wagner had shot to death a boy he had thrown inside a trench" (118); he also had preference for "crushing bones" (104) by throwing stacks of lumber over the prisoners. There are records about Frenzel and Wagner's participation in the mass shooting of Dutch escapees that is represented in the film. The narratives about Wagner set this historical character as one to be counted among the many examples of evil Nazi characters that one can find in a film: both narratives and the film represent Wagner as cruel, brutal, unlikeable, a slave profiteer and a cold killer. Thus, *Escape from Sobibor* can be set as one example of how American cinema portrays Nazis as sadistic killers, denouncing frequently their actions towards the Jews and the Holocaust. Nevertheless, the portrayal of the Polish people and Ukrainian guards shows the ways in which the film can omit certain historical issues in order to comply with its own historical moment, late 1980s, the connections between Poland and the West as opposed to Ukrainian close attachment to Communism.

REPRESENTATION IN *SAVING PRIVATE RYAN*

The third film in this group of films prior to the 1990s is *Saving Private Ryan*. It is a fictional account of a group of eight American soldiers during the Allied invasion of Europe, on a quest to find an American paratrooper in which three soldier brothers were killed in action. The film is directed by Steven Spielberg, and stars Tom Hanks as Captain John Miller. His squad of soldiers is played by actors not well known by that time. They also represent several ethnic and regional backgrounds that form the American people: religious southerner Jackson (Barry

Pepper); Italian-American Caparzo (Vin Diesel); paramedic Wade (Giovanni Ribisi), sergeant Horvath (Tom Sizemore); Irish-American Reiben (Edward Burns) and Jewish Mellish (Adam Goldberg). These soldiers participate and survive through the very violent initial landing, and are later joined by an interpreter, corporal Timothy Upham (Jeremy Davies).

Combat movies are a subgenre of the historical film with familiar elements. These movies often focus on a platoon, introducing audiences "to a small force of five to ten men. The combat group is typically diverse, frequently including a guy from Brooklyn, a religiously inclined sharpshooter from the South, and a variety of other stock characters" (Toplin 13). The conclusion of the combat movie "almost always involves a battle that claims the lives of some of the leading characters but nevertheless produces a victory" (13). *Private Ryan* has these basic characteristics. The film's photography is also interesting as an aesthetic choice: "moviegoers can often recognize the historical genre from the texture of the film. Cinematic artists often manipulate a movie's grain and coloration, attempting to give their productions a look of period authenticity. Steven Spielberg operated in a related way, washing sharp colors out of *Saving Private Ryan*, especially in the opening scenes depicting the D–Day assault" (13). To emulate the time that he represents, Spielberg's directed his scenes as if he wanted to create images with the appearance of old newsreel reports: the film does reference "1940s newsreels and pre–existent generic formulations of the combat movie in its signifying structure" (Hallam 119).

In *Saving Private Ryan* the Germans are first presented as enemies, represented collectively by the German Armed forces. At first, the film sees the Nazis in their military strength, but later on the film focuses on a particular Nazi character (a SS soldier) that will serve the purpose to indicate that in its heart, each and every Nazi soldier was a criminal. The Nazi character which will be an object of analysis is actually an SS member. But the film constantly reminds the viewer that SS soldiers invariably represent crime, aggression, and violence. In contrast, American soldiers represent freedom, resistance to evil, self–sacrifice, salvation, and the ultimate defense of democracy.

Three sequences will be here analyzed. The first one presents a captured SS soldier, named as "Steamboat Willie". He is captured after a brutal fight, in which the American paramedic

is killed; soon after, the American squad decides to execute the Nazi. He strongly pleads for mercy, thus leading the audience to align with his grief, and is defended by the American interpreter. After heavy arguments between the squad, the leading officer agrees to release the Nazi, under the condition that he would surrender to the first American platoon he sees. In this scene, the Nazi soldier appears as someone who is not evil, but a victim of circumstance. The second scene to be analyzed takes place by the end of the film, during a battle where the main American soldiers and a squad of paratroopers are set against SS soldiers. There is a fight between an SS trooper and the American squad's Jewish member. Gradually, the Nazi overtakes and slowly kills the Jewish soldier. The importance of this particular sequence is to serve as a representation of the Holocaust: the SS Nazi standing over the Jewish character while thrusting his knife over his body without any mercy or sign of humanity. The third sequence shows how "Steamboat Willie" was returned to fight the Americans, instead of surrendering, as he had promised. He shoots and kills the American captain who saved his life, which is witnessed by the American interpreter. Thus, this particular Nazi character embodies some of the characteristics which are commonly attributed to Nazis: a criminal, a deceiver, a murderer. The interpreter surrenders and after a brief exchange, he kills the Nazi with a rifle shoot. The film reinforces that Nazis are all unworthy of trust, reinforcing the right of the Americans to fight the Nazi system.

The film begins with the violent Normandy landing sequence. It is a landmark regarding the representation of war combat and violence, and Spielberg's direction[12] throws the viewer right into the middle of the action. The director "follows the attackers as they travel on the landing craft, charge into the

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[12] Directing is an act that constructs "a relation of representation or doubling accompanied necessarily by a relative devaluation of the scene's realities, now only representative of the realities of reality. But on the other hand, and inseparably, in order for the function of representation to be fulfilled, the activity of directing must also be an activity which unifies all the movements, those on both sides of the frame's limit, imposing here and there, in "reality" just as in the real, the same norms, the same ordering of all drives, excluding, obliterating, effacing them no less off the scene than on" (Habib 354).

water, struggle to secure a position on the beaches, and then attempt to mount an assault on the well–entrenched enemy" (Toplin 112). The film's twenty–five minute montage[13] narrates the battle: the chaotic arrival under machine–gun and mortar fire, the slow and painful advance into the beach, the assembly of soldiers near the German concrete bunkers and the breakthrough into the inside, where the Americans are able to respond to the enemy fire and overrun the defenders. The sense of realism is deeply evoked by the use of handheld newsreel cameras that allow the viewer to be part of the battle. This camera movement creates "a sense of total immersion and chaotic immediacy within the heart of the action" (Hallam 118). From the very beginning "the film suggests in subtle ways that the Americans who risked their lives in that great enterprise are worthy of praise" (Toplin 116). One of the most highlighted elements in the sequence is the sound[14]: the soundwaves hit hard the landing boats, and the first noises of bullets, mortar shells and machine gun fire are heard: "the sounds of bullets and explosions unrelentingly blend with the voices of screaming men" (Friedman 227). When the first boat opens its doors, the first lines of men are swiftly mowed down by the fire poured upon them from the German machine gun nests. Soldiers are burned, machine gunned, drowned, and the scene evokes the ultimate sacrifice of these American soldiers against the Nazi enemy. It is an extremely impressive representation of the violence that conveys the feeling of sacrifice and death. Photography alternates between first and third person perspectives, creating a sequence that plunges the viewer in the middle of the fight. The Americans are nevertheless able to defeat the Nazis. Mellish is identified as a Jewish soldier, prompting Jewish resistance against Nazism and perhaps the Holocaust, when he recovers a Hitler Youth knife from the body of a dead German, which will be used later for a Jewish religious service.

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[13] One of the main characteristics of montage is the one that gives meaning to the narrative, helping to understand how the story is constructed: "the montage sequence tends to function as a transitional summary, compressing a single causal development" (Bordwell 20).

[14] Corrigan and White state that the use of sound "engages viewers perceptually, provides key spatial and story information, and affords an aesthetic experience of its own" (176).

The Character of "Stemboat Willie"

Later on the film (01:23:38), after losing Caparzo in a skirmish with a German sniper, Miller and his squad are into French territory searching for Ryan. The squad discovers three dead American paratroopers, killed when trying to cross a field near a German radio station. Miller rallies his men to assault the station, to prevent other soldiers from being killed. After already losing one man, the other soldiers object by saying that their objective is to find Ryan, but Miller states that their main objective is to win the war. The squad sets itself to attack the station; Upham is left behind with a marksman scope. Most of the action during this sequence is seen through this scope in Upham's eyes, with the camera emulating the scope's view.

The men attack the station; there is a brief exchange of machine gun fire and grenades. Four German SS soldiers are dead. Upham is called, and ordered to bring medical aid. The hand–held camera trembles after him, crossing the field through smoke; when it dissipates, the camera presents Wade, who is severely wounded after being hit by machine gun fire; he dies asking for his mother. The scene is traumatic, shot mainly in closes; the audience is thrown into the scene, side by side with the squad. Miller despairs, shakes and cries. The only German survivor is then presented in this sequence.

He is violently attacked by Jackson, Reiben and Mellish. The German falls to the ground, screaming and trying to cover himself. The men point their weapons, preparing to execute him. Miller intervenes and says that he will first dig graves for the fallen paratroopers and for Wade. Upham is astonished. He speaks German, can comprehend the German, and asks if the captain is really allowing the execution. The sequece presents an ethical problem, that will also be used to demonstrate the American soldiers' humanity, even when fighting the Nazis. Moreover, it serves to represent the degree of citizenship and civilization of the American soldiers, who are willing to hear their enemy's pleas for life.

Figs. 10 and 11: German soldier "Steamboat Willie" pleading for his life

Regarding Upham's concern about the prisoner, they both are almost always framed together and side by side; in some shots, the German appears inside the grave, in a lower position, enhancing his pleading status. The soldier's humanity is an ethical statement about the Americans as people: "this ethical dilemma is expanded and explored in a sequence where Captain Miller's unit does take a prisoner of war, a man so desperate to stay alive that his begging takes the form of a recitation of every American notion cluttering up his mind: 'I like American... Steamboat Willie, Betty Boop, Betty Grable, nice gams. .... What a dish! ... Donald Duck ... O-oh say can you sink?... Fuck Hitler....'" (Jaehne 41). The audience may be led to expect that this life will be spared by the soldiers who are fighting for a Democracy.

The German digs and pleads to Upham to not allow the others to kill him. He goes on saying that he loves America and speaks about the famous Mickey Mouse cartoon Steamboat Willie, thus becoming identified by this name. Upham pleads to the captain that he is a war prisoner, to the dismay of the other soldiers. After an argument between the soldiers, Miller allows the German to go, setting him blindfolded in straight direction, and orders him to surrender to the first American platoon he comes across. Reiben threatens to leave the squad, but Miller replies that the reason for letting the German go was that "the more men I kill, the farthest away from home I feel – and if that finding Ryan will get me to go back to my wife, then that`s my

mission" (01:42:10). He also reveals a much discussed secret about his pre–war civilian identity: Miller is not a professional soldier, instead just a high school teacher. The squad agrees to continue the search. The moment presents Captain Miller as the "Frank Capra version of the American soldier, the antithesis of the Wehrmacht automaton, a school teacher who becomes a warrior of necessity, not bloodlust, who wants only to finish the job and get back home to his wife in small–town Pennsylvania" (Doherty 70).

The Death of a Jewish Soldier as a Representation of the Holocaust

The battle with a squad from the 2nd Armored SS Division happens by the end of the film. The Germans come with tanks and halftracks, and Miller's men are able to inflict severe casualties upon them. Mellish and paratrooper Henderson open fire from a machine gun against the Germans who attack the place. Henderson is shot and killed. One last German engages in hand fight with Mellish. Upham is visible in the street about the same time, distressed, cornered and crying. He hears Mellish screams asking for him to come and help. Carefully, he steps over the ladder leading to the second stage, from where he can hear Mellish and the German fighting. Mellish grabs the Hitler Youth knife he found in the Normandy beach, but the German overpowers and stabs Mellish in the chest, killing him. The German tries to be nice to the dying American soldier, speaking softly in German, of how "we must end this at once". Leaving the place, the German sees Upham in the stairs, sitting and crying. As Upham poses no threat, he leaves.

The death of Jewish Mellish in the hands of a German SS is very evocative of the Holocaust: "among the reasons for the U. S. to enter WW II, the death of Mellish serves to remind us of the Jews being slaughtered by the Germans, while the search for Private Ryan represents the sacrifices made necessary because America entered the war at such a late stage, when so many fronts demanded so much manpower" (Jaehne 40).

Figs. 12 and 13: Mellish's death at the hands of a SS soldier

The painful and slow death of this Jewish soldier with a Nazi over him may invoke the Holocaust. The German lies over Mellish almost the whole sequence, slowly pressing the knife against his body, while speaking very calmly in German. Thus, it may be understood as a depiction of how Nazi Germany slowly and painfully stabed the heart of the Jewish people. The camera alternates between close–up shots of both Mellish, struggling to stop the fight, and the SS, from above, giving a sense of suspense. The SS soldier even tries to calm down Mellish, by stating that it is actually a good thing that Mellish would die in the fight. Despite the fact that this would represent the German his life, one may invoke that the death of a Jew in the hands of a Nazi could be seen as something good for the Germans. The image itself invokes the Holocaust, presented with the "superior" German Übermensch standing over the dead Jew, stabbed in the heart.

The Jewish character and his suffering are a possible reminder of the Holocaust, and have other marks along the film. It reminds the audience that the fight against Nazi Germany is also a race against time to end the Holocaust by destroying German war capabilities: "Spielberg seems off–balance in limning the Jewish guy Mellish, an overdetermined Nazi–hater, who breaks down in tears when clutching a Hitler youth dagger ('Now it's a Shabbat hallah cutter') and taunts German P.O.W.s by waving a Star of David and hissing, 'Juden, Ja , Juden'" (Doherty 70). In the end, the dagger that Mellish takes in the beach is the weapon that eventually causes his death.

"Steamboat Willie" Returns

At the end of the film, the battle between the Americans and the Germans resumes. Many Germans and most of the American soldiers are dead. Jackson and another paratrooper shooting from a bell tower are killed by a German tank. The Americans retreat to the defended bridge, followed by the Germans. Upham is left behind and takes cover, as rows of Germans pass near him, but without noticing his presence. He sees Steamboat Willie among them: instead of surrendering himself, he returns to the fight. Upham sees him shooting an American soldier in the back, and Captain Miller in the chest.

A wounded Miller prepares to set a demolition charge to destroy the bridge, preventing the Germans from crossing it. A German tank starts to cross, and Miller fires his pistol against it. The tank explodes, attacked by American airplanes, to which the Germans retreat. Upham is able to surrender a group of six German soldiers, among them Steamboat Willie, who smiles but also taunts him in German (02:34:47). A brief silence follows as Willie simply says Upham's name; Upham shoots him dead, and allows the other Germans to go. Following the airplanes attack, many American soldiers with tanks arrive. Private Ryan is saved and the mission is accomplished.

Fig. 14: Steamboat Willie in action Fig. 15: Upham prepares to shoot

The film ends with a victory for the American forces. The film thus justifies the American forces and condemns the Germans. The character of Steamboat Willie summarizes this struggle between goodness and badness. At first, Steamboat

Willie benefits from the mercy of a sympathetic American officer, played by one of the most famous actors in Hollywood (Tom Hanks), but later repays this goodness by killing him. Nazi soldiers are presented as characters who do not deserve any kind of sympathy or kindness whatsoever, since they are treacherous. They are also reduced to a stereotype of evilness. Americans are presented fighting for what the audience identify as democracy's just cause. American victory is declared "in the landscape after battle, with the armored cavalry riding up and the P–51s soaring above, the combat zone is secure enough for the exit line" (Doherty 70–71).

As suggested by Zinn, the cause for the Americans to struggle is a noble one: "all that bloodshed, all that pain, all those torn limbs and exposed intestines will not deter a brave people from going to war. They just need to believe that the cause is just" (Zinn 139). The film makes use of a very strong sense of strong realism to achieve the crudeness and sacrifice of the American soldiers: "more than any other entertainment film of recent memory, *Saving Private Ryan* comes wrapped in an esthetic of realism that is its red badge of pure motives and high purpose" (Doherty 68). It also presents America's sacrifice for freedom: "in *Saving Private Ryan* there is never any doubt that the cause is just. This is the good war. There is no need to say the words explicitly" (Zinn 139).

There could be the apparent glorification not just of the American soldiers or their cause, but of war itself, and the problematic and dangerous subject is if there is indeed not only a "just" war, but a "good" war. The exploits of brave American soldiers and the denouncing of the evil deeds by the Germans can be seen as a complex task, as suggested by Zinn: "getting rid of fascism was a good cause. Yet, does that unquestionably make it a good war? The war corrupted us, did it not? The hate it engendered was not confined to Nazis" (139). The author also reminds that "we put Japanese families in concentration camps. We killed huge numbers of innocent people? The word 'atrocity' fits in our bombings of Dresden, Hamburg, Tokyo, and finally Hiroshima and Nagasaki" (Zinn 139). Perhaps the idea is that America was fighting to stop the Nazis and by consequence, the Holocaust would be stopped as well, something that would render the American's participation something as a necessity: "no war

should be labeled 'good'. However some wars become necessary" (Suid 1186).

The representation presented in all three films reinforces a very specific idea of Nazi characters. Visible in all three film, the Holocaust is a theme that identifies Nazism as a human tragedy. *Sophie* and *Sobibor* are accounts that clearly recreate stories centered upon the Holocaust, and *Private Ryan* does remind the theme of the Jewish persecution by the Nazis in one of its character's death. Nazis in these films clearly act as the antagonists; the representation engages the spectator against them and their actions, identifying them as the cause of the protagonists' dramas and sufferings. Therefore, the viewer's identities are invited to align with the characters who act against the Nazis, in this point identified with evilness, crime, persecution, torment, and many other negative actions.

The form that was chosen by these three films is not a new one: since the camp's liberations, the Holocaust has been identified as a Nazi (and German) phenomenon, thus linking Germany with one of the major and most horrible examples of crime in human history. To identify against the Nazi characters is to identify with the other characters in these narratives: the Jewish victims or the soldiers such as those depicted in the three films. Therefore, these films advance the notion that Nazis were all but the same. There is no mention or space to the victimization or relativization of the Nazi characters; they are never likeable. The films present the Holocaust as a Nazi crime, where Nazis are mainly Germans, making the Holocaust as Germany's and its nationals responsibility. The next three films under analysis present a somehow different representation of such historical period. They challenge the once common view that all Germans were part of the Nazi world. In these films, they are characterized and act in different ways, even towards the Holocaust.

CHAPTER III

THE CHANGING ROLE OF NAZI CHARACTERS IN
SCHINDLER'S LIST, *VALKYRIE* AND *THE READER*

This chapter presents the analysis of particular scenes in the three films nominated above. In this analysis, I have selected three sequences for each film. The selection was based on their importance for the film and its portrayal of the main characters in the films discussed below: industrialist Oskar Schindler, who saves Jews during the Holocaust, German officer Klaus von Stauffenberg, who conspires to kill Hitler, and Holocaust perpetrator Hanna Schmitz, portrayed in a softened tone when compared to the films discussed in chapter two. The sequences, analyzed according to formal structures (editing, music, lighting, photography), are created in order to highlight the different portrayal of such characters, and to create different portrayals of the Nazi characters which are the film's protagonists, considering previous representations.

REPRESENTATION IN *SCHINDLER'S LIST*

Schindler's List presents the story of industrialist Oskar Schindler, who himself gives a figure of approximately 1,200 Jewish workers saved from the Holocaust: after the war "he told the investigators that he had 1,200 Jews working for him by the time he relocated his armaments factory to the Sudetenland in the fall of 1944" (Crowe 401). The character differs from the typical Nazi villain that was portrayed in many Hollywood representations: instead of participating in the Holocaust, he goes against it. Schindler detaches himself from the Nazi world and becomes the savior to many Jewish victims, contrasting with the film's Nazi villain, who is SS officer Amon Goeth (Ralph Fiennes).

The Holocaust is seen through the eyes of Schindler (Liam Neeson), who is also a member of the Nazi Party. His main ally is Jewish accountant Ithzak Stern (Ben Kingsley). Stern is portrayed as humble, moderate, civilized, respected and admired by the other Jewish characters. Stern is found by Schindler in the

Judenrat, the Jewish organism set up by the Nazis to implement racial and social policies towards the Jews. Working with Schindler since then, he contacts the Jewish investors who provide money so Schindler can buy an enamelware factory; during the Ghetto days, he provides work permits to the factory, sheltering some Jews away from Nazi brutality, meanwhile profiting from their labor.

With the exception of the final scene, the film is shot in black and white color in order to bring a notion of realism: it employs "a purposeful documentary visual and photographic technique in *Schindler's List* (1993), in which cinematography Janusz Kaminski used black–and–white photography throughout most of the story, giving the film a documentary-like appearance" (Toplin 13).

The audience is already able to understand Oskar Schindler's character, as a main one from the beginning of the film: the first shot of Schindler shows him in a room, his face hidden from the camera, choosing clothing like a shirt and ties, assorting a great sum of money, adjusting the sleeves' cufflinks and making sure he is wearing his Nazi Party's pin. Schindler goes to a nightclub, full with top Nazi officials, with whom he tries to get involved. Schindler watches the Nazis with cynicism, as if he despises such world. He orders a waiter to deliver a bottle to a Nazi (07:15:00), who is accompanied by a Polish girl and another officer. Schindler is able to control all, presenting his charisma and his ability to make things happen the way he wants. When the scene cuts, Schindler is already seated with several other Nazis; he is able to take several pictures with them and finally is seeing commemorating with the highest ranking officer in the place, SS general Julian Scherner. Schindler is represented as a party man, someone with great skill to manipulate people and set things to his own benefit. He plays the Nazis the way he likes and is portrayed as a very talented character, someone with whom the audience may identify. A close up shot, however, reveals the character's contempt for the Nazis.

Commander Amon Goeth's portrayal is very different from Schindler's. The first scene where Goeth appears depicts his unpredictability and cruelty. As a SS officer, Goeth arrives at the Plaszow Concentration Camp construction site, during the severe Polish winter (00:51:00). Goeth comes to supervise the works and to choose a personal maid from the Jewish female workers. There

he notices and chooses Helen Hirsch; at first he appears as a sympathetic character, despite the clear sense of fear that the prisoners have of him. Soon after, there is an altercation between the leading female engineer and one of the SS officers about the camp's foundations. She says that the foundation must be demolished and built again, lest the camp's structure will collapse. Goeth briefly interrogates her and orders one of his men to shoot her in the view of everyone. Helen stands still and watches the scene, testifying the brutal scene of horror committed by her new employer. This is the first of several scenes during the film's narrative directed towards a depiction of Goeth's cruelty against the prisoners. One of the most famous is the one where Goeth uses a sniper rifle and takes aim, searching the field for people to kill (01:15:10); he kills two women in the scene, demonstrating his complete power over the prisoners. His relation with his maid Helen Hirsch is also of violence and abuse. Undeniably attracted to her, he cannot accept the fact of being a "pure Aryan" in love with a "racially impure" Jewish woman. Menwhile Goeth abuses women, Schindler saves them: one certain Regina Perlman visited him to ask his help on rescuing her parents, held as prisoners in Plazsow. Schindler at first is dismissive: he potentialy fears that the woman could be a Gestapo informer. Perlman is expelled from his office (01:31:58), but Schindler is able to rescue the couple anyway. But perhaps the best scene to depict Goeth as a main perpetrator of the Holocaust is the Krakow Ghetto action.

Krakow Ghetto Liquidation

The sequence where the Krakow Ghetto is liquidated is of crucial importance to the film's narrative, because it marks the moment when Schindler has a change of heart and starts walking the path that will lead him to save his Jewish workers. The sequence is divided in two main sets, perceived by the three main characters. From a distance and over the top of a cliff, Schindler is able to testify the destruction of the Ghetto and the arrest of its inhabitants. The same event is perceived on the lower ground, from the perspective of victim Ithzak Stern and perpetrator Amon Goeth, the latter seeing the assault as an attack against memory itself: he addresses his men before the action, stating that the

previous six hundred years of Jewish history are about to be erased from History. Obliteration of memory and history are also part of Nazism criminality.

The sequence is constantly highlighted with violence: there are random executions of people in the streets; in an act of passive resistance, patients from a hospital are poisoned by their doctors not to suffer from Nazi bullets; the sound is full with shooting, noises and screaming both from the Nazis and from the victims; other scenes of resistance depict people eating their own jewels, and a young boy who tricks three Nazi soldiers to save a neighbour and her daughter. Photographer Janusz Kaminski uses handheld cameras as their unsteadiness evoke the moment's chaos and turbulence. The *mise–en–scène* places the audience inside the sequence, reinforcing the film's documentary sense. Goeth is depicted executing prisoners, and the Nazis' actions are parallel to a sack: rows of bags and suitcases are open and disposed of; piles of corpses start to appear in some places. During the whole sequence, the Nazis act with extreme brutality: they beat or kill people for no reason; framed in the middle of the shot during a segment of this sequence, commander Goeth runs alongside his dogs and some of his men searching frenetically for hidden Jews.

Schindler watches everything in horror from the top of a hill; the camera, in a few plongée shots, follows his eyes into the chaos. Suddenly the image of a little girl in red dress (a rare moment in color, to enhance the child's appearance) is framed in the middle of a shot. She draws Schindler's attention (and the audience's as well); music returns to the film in this particular moment, as she walks among the chaos, to climb some stairs and hide under a bed. The persecuted girl who hides from the Nazis resembles the fantasy image of a child who hides under the bed from monsters. This moment is of huge importance to the narrative: Schindler is sensitized, and from now on he will start to take the path towards saving his workers.
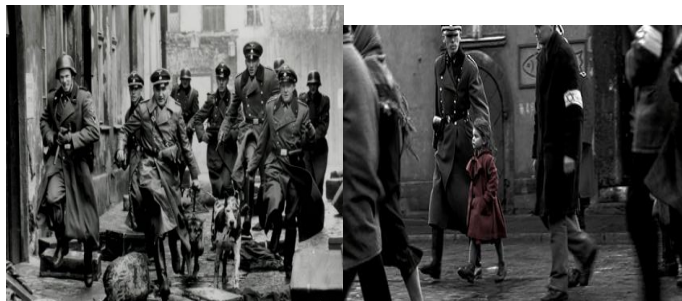
Fig. 16: Krakow Ghetto Liquidation Fig. 17: the "little girl in red dress"

The Character of Schindler as Opposed to the Character of Goeth

Several moments in the film present Schindler portrayed in front of Goeth, as if his character would represent the perfect opposite to the Nazi commander, but this does not happen from the start. What is first presented is how both characters are somehow similar in the beginning. As Manchell explains, there are parallels between Schindler and Goeth:

> Neither one acts virtuously when we first meet them. Schindler goes to the Judenrat to get Stem's help in running his business; Goeth arrives at the construction site of the forced labor camp to establish his authority. Both Schindler and Goeth use Jewish slave labor to operate their 'businesses.' Just as Schindler interviews ten Polish women for a secretary's job, focusing on their physical beauty rather than on their professional skills, so Goeth 'interviews' a line of Jewish prisoners for a maid's position, selecting the one least qualified for domestic work. Following the massacre in the ghetto, Schindler reflects on the tragedy by

looking down from his upstairs office on the empty factory floor below, while Goeth looks down from his balcony on the morning roll call. When Schindler first meets Goeth, their initial conversations are about clothes, money, and business pressures. (Manchell 98)

Yet such similarities are only apparent, and the film will use its photography to underscore how: the characters are different in their essence and actions. At first, even Schindler appears to be convinced of Goeth's humanity. He defends the Nazi, arguing that "Goeth is really not such a bad fellow and that the two of them have a lot in common: womanizing, drinking, a love of the good life" (98). As Manchell reminds us, the point of rupture comes with Stern's narration: he "reminds Schindler and us that the chief difference between the two men is that Goeth is a killer. Spielberg then intercuts Goeth's random shooting of twenty–five laborers in a returning work group" (Manchell 98). The difference between the characters is again highlighted in a balcony scene, "where Schindler lectures Goeth about the importance of temperance, power, and justice. He tells him the parable about the emperor who had the ability to execute but preferred to pardon. Goeth tries to apply this principle but is unable to do so. Schindler can" (98). These scenes are used to infuse into the audience the notion that both are very different characters, whose apparent resemblances may arise due to the fact that they both live in the same world; but their actions result from their choices as human beings, and such choices are used to define and characterize them. To underscore such differences, the film makes use of the aesthetic convention that opposes both characters inside the frame, as following:

Figs. 18–20

The differences between the characters are also important to further reveal the changes Schindler undergoes. Some examples are the moment when they are shaving (prior to the sequence where the Krakow Ghetto will be liquidated), or their discussion just before the making of the list. Schindler goes to Goeth to ask permission to take his Jewish workers to his factory in Czechoslovakia (02:19:51). The sequence begins with the two characters speaking in the balcony of Goeth's villa, where the scene is set; a window is between them and the camera. The sequence is constructed in a way that enhances the contrast between Schindler (a rescuer) and Goeth (a greedy Nazi murderer).

The *mise–en–scène* emphasizes the positive aspects of the altruistic title character, which is opposed to the main Nazi perpetrator who is associated with murderous actions. The sequence is composed with the eye–level camera. When it begins, the photography portrays both characters facing each other, divided by the window's border. The *mise–en–scène* suggests that the characters appear to live in different worlds, each occupying a same–size frame. The natural light comes from the outside. As Goeth argues about money, nervously walking out of the frame and moving around Schindler, his uncertainty and his doubts are expressed by fast camera movements, from left to right (02:20:02); there is the general use of a tracking shot, in a panning movement. The frame is open: Goeth moves in and out, and Schindler follows his unrest. Eventually, Goeth relents and returns to his initial position, where he confronts Schindler; both

are always separated in the picture by the frame of the window. Schindler takes his part in the discussion once more and the camera freezes. The conversation resumes and Goeth, who appears to accept the fact that he will not be able to understand Schindler's true intentions regarding the transport of the prisoners, soon agrees to what he understands as a corruption scheme (02:20:47). The whole sequence tries to advance Goeth's nervousness; there is no music, as if silence would enhance the suspense. Also, editing is absent: the whole sequence is depicted in a single take, evoking Schindler's urgency in acting before the workers are sent to Auschwitz.

The sequence highlights that corruption must be acknowledged as a major issue when dealing with an analysis of the Nazi world. Apparently, Oskar Schindler had good knowledge of this practice, which was regular among the SS: "corruption became a serious problem within the SS during the war, particularly in the vast complex of concentration, forced labor and death camps that it ran" (Crowe 344–345). Goeth was a major murderer, but was also willing to trade some Jews for large sums of money. The film presents Schindler using Goeth's greed in order to save his workers.

By the end of the sequence, Schindler is able to convince Goeth to allow him to do what he wants. Schindler crosses the space marked by the window's frame, going from his place to Goeth's, in a movement that appears to put the Nazi officer against the wall: the huge figure of Schindler moves towards Goeth, as he would force his will upon him. This shot's frame is small, indicating a sense of urgency as Schindler challenges Goeth: "What's a person worth to you?" Convinced that everything is about money, Goeth repeats the question: "No, no, no: what's a person worth to you?" (02:21:08). Schindler wins the argument as he will be able to take the prisoners away, smiling with discretion as the scene ends. The sequence is not edited, as it is shown in a single take without cuts, and helps to establish Schindler's power and control over Goeth.

Figs. 21 and 22: Schindler asks Goeth for his workers

This sequence is fundamental to the narrative: it is the moment when Schindler faces a major risk by asking the Nazi villain permission to take his workers away from the Holocaust. The sequence demonstrates also Schindler's skill and intelligence as a businessman, as he is able to convince Goeth of his false intentions of profit. The sequence also establishes Schindler as a hero, who is willing to risk his life to save his Jewish workers. The sequence where he writes his list comes immediately after this one. Both sequences are linked together; this one sets its importance by being the moment when Schindler will ask for the people that he will save from the Holocaust.

The sequence also demonstrates Schindler's characterization: "an adventurer, a gambler, a risk-taker, a showman" (Maron 153), who can actually move untouched through the dangerous Nazi world, and, even by being at first a profiteer of slave labor, Schindler is presented as a resister to the Holocaust, and a rescuer of 1,200 Jewish people who would probably be murdered by the Nazis without his intervention.

Schindler in Auschwitz

Figs. 23 and 24: Schindler saves his female workers in Auschwitz

Being a symbol of the Holocaust, Auschwitz features in the film as a place of profound horror and barbarism. The camp is first presented when the women train takes the wrong direction and ends up in the death camp, at night. This sequence may echo the previous one in Goeht's villa, as Schindler will have to move quickly once more to save his workers. The *mise–en–scène* is very similar to the one in *Sophie's Choice*. Nightime evokes darkness, nightmare, horror. The camp's structures, with barbed wire fences and concrete buildings, is surrounded by the sound of barking dogs and guard's screams. The women are quickly forced out of the train, to have their hairs cut and made to undress. They are led naked into a large building with sprinklers. The whole sequence is built upon a huge feeling of terror: the Jewish women are in a state of total submission and abandonment; the photography focuses some of them in closes, their eyes are motionless with fear. The film's music for the sequence is phantasmagoric, constantly evoking death and suffering. The camera alternates between the prisoners' faces and the showers. Neither the prisoners nor the audience are able to guess what will come down: water or gas. This lasts for some few disturbing moments but the showers are of water and the prisoners are relieved. However, the next scene does present an immense line of prisoners being led to an underground building, over which there is a large chimney, which is the exhaust port of a gas

chamber. Thus, Spielberg does not simply compose a sequence of relief: right in the next moment, there is the unequivocal acknowledgement of the gas chambers by the film.

After being informed of the train's destination, Schindler immediately heads to Auschwitz. He is able to bribe the camp's commander with diamonds and recovers his female workers; corruption is portrayed once more. During an interception with soldiers who were taking young girls out of the line to be murdered, Schindler argues that these are his girls, that they manufacture bullets and is able to save them as well (02:30:45). Schindler enters with the prisoners in his new factory at Brinlitz: he is seen in the middle of the rescued workers. Schindler may be compared to Moses due to his relation with the Jewish people, and to Christ due to the act of rescue. As suggested by Richard Alleva, Schindler's figure resembles the figure of a saving God: "all we see is Gleamin Neeson, striding amongst those he has saved like some imperial and Christian God: white, middle–class, capitalist" (Alleva 70). The war ends shortly after and the workers are saved. The last sequence, in color, resembles the creation of the State of Israel. After Schindler's departure, a Russian officer liberates the prisoners, but warns them not to come neither East or West; they are hated in both directions. He points to a city nearby, a possible reference to Israel, the new State to which the prisoners depart. In the film's last montage, Goeth is hanged for crimes against humanity, meanwhile explaining that Schindler was honored in Israel as a "Just Gentile", and later emigrated to Argentina. He returned to Germany, and died on 9 October 1974, in Hildesheim (Crowe 587–588). The murderer Amon Goeth was tried before the Supreme National Tribunal in Poland in 1946; "he was sentenced to death and was hanged on 13 September 1946 at the Montelupich Prison in Krakow" (McKale 201).

Schindler's character is the only exception in the representation of non–Jewish characters: in the film "the Germans are not merely cruel, but greedy, self–indulgent and not terribly bright, as shown by Ralph Fiennes's characterization of Amon Goeth" (Carchidi 65). The Holocaust is represented through the eyes of America's cinematographic establishment, but at the same time it dismisses any rescue attempt of Holocaust victims through omission: "the film is a milestone in the 'Americanisation of the Holocaust'. However, what it reveals

about 'Americanising' is disheartening: endorsing *Schindler's List* as both education and art discloses America's willed blindness to its own historical complicity in the atrocities" (66), since the Americans did not do very much to prevent them: "the American Air Force was not willing to bomb the access' railroads to Auschwitz–Birkenau and to destroy the extermination facilities inside the camp; it neither received orders for such" (Wistrich 258).

The bath scene in Auschwitz has been questioned by Victoria Carchidi and others as well. It was created with techniques of suspense, as when "a group of women are herded into a shower room and wait, not knowing whether gas or water will emerge from the nozzles" (67). The scene was accused of having been enacted in a cliff–hanging, happy–ending style which suggests that "Spielberg has momentarily wandered back to the world of adventure stories" (Gross 22). The question of loss and death as depicted in the film is also problematic; though not unharmed, the central characters emerge alive from the narrative: "as for attesting to the death camps, no character we care about gets killed" (Carchidi 70). One major problem with the sequence is that it implies that "Jews were saved, not exterminated" (71). Due to the process of empathy created by the film's emphasis on certain characters who survive, the film creates a sense of relief when the audience sees their survival. Although it is acknowledged as a fact that some Jews survived the Holocaust, the film seems to efface the fact that the great majority of Jews in Europe were exterminated. Joseph Berger gives the figure of around 55,000 survivors in the aftermath of Germany's defeat (684); for comparison, Lucy Dawidowitz states that around 5,93 million were killed by the Nazis (403).

The development of the film's story through the perpetrators' point of view is shown as problematic, as the events are shown through a privileged position, "with the eyes of those who had the power of life and death. In this way, there is no attempt to capture a glimpse of the daily suffering in camp or ghetto: the kind of personal and characterizing detail which videotestimony projects record through the 'lens' of the survivors' recollections" (Hartmann 128). The distance from the events may explain the choice to create the narrative through the perpetrator's eyes: "fifty years after the event, popular conceptions of the Holocaust are more than ever filtered through

media depictions" (Greenberg 58). The problem of *Schindler* is the problem of representation of the main character, a "Nazi hero": "Spielberg's Holocaust variously anatomizes and debates Spielberg's choice of Schindler as hero; *Schindler's List*'s emphasis upon the rescue of individual lives rather than the death of an entire people; its silence on the formidable assaults of the Holocaust upon traditional Jewish theological belief" (58); the author also remarks Spielberg's "positioning of the viewer as compliant recipient of its historical and ideological view–points; its construction of the 'Schindler Jews' as largely anonymous, passive ethnic stereotypes" (58).

Some contextual evidence that helps explain the film's portrayal of such event deals with the fact that American welcome to the subject "was the culmination of mounting interest in the Holocaust over the past two decades. Increased visits to European Holocaust locales and involvement with their preservation has been paralleled by the extensive construction of 'virtual' Holocaust sites in United States memorials and museums" (Greenberg 59).

The scenario in Germany must be well comprehended to understand the film's success: it ascribes *Schindler's List*'s substantial German success to its fortuitous arrival at a time when the country was particularly preoccupied with mourning and atonement for the ruinous Nazi past. Schindler's status as 'good German' offered heady possibilities for identification: "Spielberg was doubly lauded as a Jew of German extraction who had valorized an Aryan icon of national rehabilitation" (Loshitzky 59). Thus, the film may be understood as an opportunity for Germans to identify with someone who could work as an unlikely national hero; perhaps, this is one of the major reasons for the film's success.The film forced other countries to face their compliance over Nazi occupation and their role during the Holocaust: "circumstances in France made for a far less felicitous appraisal of the film and its creator. *Schindler's List* opened just as the Touvier affair was spurring a wrenching, frequently ambivalent reappraisal of Vichy's active role as well as quotidian passive compliance in the deportation of Jewish citizens." (Lehrer 59). The author also states that "the memory politics of the day did not stir a general move towards guilty atonement as in Germany" (Lehrer 59).

The issue of representing the Holocaust and the Americanization of this historical subject showed its burden when the film was released in Israel, where *Schindler's List* was criticized. As Lehrer explains, "the Jewish homeland had been wrestling with profound ambivalence toward Holocaust survivors for decades. Israeli disdain for the perceived wholesale passivity of Diaspora Jews hearkened back to the pre–World War II period, ripening into outright anger after the achievement of statehood at bloody expense" (59). The appropriation of the theme by the American industry revealed that "Israel had come to believe that it owned Shoah. From this perspective it was inevitable that *Schindler's List* should be rated a kitsch–ridden bathetic catastrophe, its director deemed a crass interloper who was bent on hijacking the Holocaust to the United States for Israel, a perennial source of sustenance and suspicion and to his own immense gain" (60).

The perpetrators' position in the film appears to be a focus of debate, asking "why *Schindler's List* is so complicit with the Hollywood convention of showing catastrophe primarily from the point of view of the perpetrators" (Bernstein 429). Bernstein stated that "repeatedly, *Schindler's List* seems to turn into an allegory about the nature of the German soul, with its 'good' and 'evil' aspects embodied by Schindler and Goeth, functioning as each other's symbolic double" (429). Nevertheless, the film presents Germans also conveying the identity of "good", even when faced with the Holocaust, by using the opposition between the main characters. The film relies on Goeth's actions to portray Nazi cruelty, and on Schindler's actions to perform good, where he could be confounded with a Christ–type of redeeming character: "Schindler's virtual apotheosis as a modern Christ figure in his sermon to the awestruck Jews looking up at him from the Brinnlitz factory floor (a direct crib from every Hollywood sand-and-sandals epic, from *The Ten Commandments* and *Ben-Hur* to *Jesus Christ Superstar*" (430). The comparison foregrounded by Bernstein suggests that Schindler may be seen as a savior, a rescuer of innocent, persecuted people; by the moment when he makes his final speech, salvation is already obtained: his Jewish workers are alive and will continue as survivors, indicating that even a disastrous event such as the Holocaust was unable to destroy these people's community.

It is important to take into account the context where the film was released: "there appears to be widespread official support for the assumption that screening a film about the horrors inflicted on European Jews will improve relations between African–Americans and Jews in this country, especially in urban high schools and universities" (431). Likewise, there was also an "eagerness to interpret the Holocaust as a parable of universal suffering, when its very essence was a deliberate, systematic, and, if such a word can be permitted in this context, 'principled' denial of even minimal humanity to those it condemned to genocidal extermination" (431), something that "bespeaks a characteristic American urge to find a redemptive meaning in every event" (431).

In spite of the fact that the Holocaust and all Nazi actions cannot be redeemed by Schindler's actions, the film foregrounds the possibility to understand that not all Germans were destructive or murderous, but that even a few of them were able to make a difference. Also, the film complies with most of Hollywood epics, staging a grand–finale like ending, where good triumphs and the evil that is represented by the Nazis is defeated, such as in the scene where Nazi commander Amon Goeth meets his end in the gallows.

The good actions in the film may lead to redemption, through the duality of good versus evil, but both roles are bestowed to German characters. The Jews are ascribed the role of passive noble victims: "*Schindler's List* is deeply complicit with the sentimentalization of victimhood as a guarantor of inner nobility, while at the level of the affective identification that it triggers, the film is equally complicit with the fascination exercised upon our imagination by the spectacle of absolute evil and power" (432). Positive identification may be granted to the character of Schindler, presented as the hero and "seeming to offer us something morally probing and original" (432). The film always explores this theme of good versus evil, "using as its main protagonist a 'good German', a popular characterization in American cinema" (Loshitzky 05).

Jeffrey Skoller argues that "because that culture was so completely destroyed, and because of the potential for spectacular representation, the Holocaust has increasingly become the central image of that Jewish past" (146). Few films have received such an immense "level of credibility of a historical document as has

Schindler's List" (148). The world importance to the film was such that it "was publicly endorsed by both the U. S. and German Presidents, students were sent to the movie theater on class field trips, and film critics declared Spielberg's accomplishment as a director nearly as miraculous as Oskar Schindler's act of salvation" (148). The context of release is notable: "produced at the moment of the end of the Cold War, takes as its hero a free market capitalist, whose solution to the Final Solution is creative entrepreneurship" (148). The film's outcome presents the idea of redemption, when Schindler is able to defy Nazism and save his workers: Schindler's workers are altogether alive and saved. Moreover, their salvation is a process of continuity: in the film's final moments, titles appear, saying there are fewer than four thousand Jews left alive in Poland today. It is "a staggering fact to say the least. But before the horror of the enormity of that figure can be thought through, it is replaced by another tide that states: there are more than six thousand descendants of the Schindler Jews" (150–151). In this way, *Schindler's List* does not redeem Nazi Germany or its people. It would simply not be enough to expect that the rescue of some 1,200 Jewish victims could wash away the enormity or the impact of the Nazi crimes. Nevertheless, the film is able to present a new account about Germans and their resistance against Nazism, that although small and mainly ineffective, it was able to produce some minor results such as the actions undertaken by Oskar Schindler. In this way, the film can be seen as functioning as an episode of remembrance, one of which new generations of Germans could watch as a symbol against the shame of belonging to the country that made use of extensive mass exterminations via gas and is often remembered for such dark period.

In spite of the varied receptions given to the film, it is important to the understanding of the Holocaust: "although released only in December 1993, *Schindler's List* has already become for the present generation the most important source of historical information affecting popular perceptions of the Holocaust" (Manchell 84). The author states that, "according to one trade publication, the film's global popularity, four months after release, had already netted its makers $170 million, an unheard of sum for a movie about the Holocaust" (Manchell 84).

Narrative and Classical Hollywood filmmaking were used to integrate older perceptions of history, as in many other films

with the same subject such as Claude Lanzmann's *Shoah*. But in *Schindler*, "audiences are given not only what they know about the Holocaust from past films but also a format with which they are comfortable" (86). This format is totally conformed with classical narrative; such "narrative dictates the action, the pace, and the imagery. This is a story of a culture that disappeared in six horrifying years, and how the efforts of one man made a difference to the few survivors" (87). Making use of rhetoric realism arguments and "relying on the classic Hollywood technique of interpreting history through the actions of centrally motivated characters, Spielberg contrasts the fate of Poland's 3.3 million Jews with the fortunes of Schindler" (88). Whatever interpretation the film may receive "it is undeniable that the public has reacted strongly to Spielberg's supposed documentation of the Holocaust. World wide audiences applaud its seeming authenticity, they marvel at his visual virtuosity, they honor his storytelling genius, and they are inspired by his humanity" (90).

Manchell states that "the cultural and historical context in which film is received assures us that one cannot control the public's reaction or the use it will find for the movie" (92). Audiences always may misunderstand films, among these those that are related to the area of recreated historical facts. Films are dramatizations "even though a large portion of the public assumes that what they see are the actual event" (95). In this case, what separates Schindler from other Nazi characters the way the public is used to see – evil and cruel characters – are his actions towards the Jewish people. He is a member of the Nazi Party, but he acts the opposite way one would expect: even if he first profits from his Jewish workers, he has a change of heart and saves many of them; also, he is presented as a different character from the beginning, first looking contemptuously towards the SS officers, and also playing several Nazi officials in order to bid his wishes.

All the other Nazis in the film are somehow like Goeth, with the exception of businessman Julius Madritsch. An industrial such as Schindler, he is revealed next to the end of the film to be a protector of Jewish laborers; Schindler oppenly invites him to take perhaps "4,000 Jews out of Poland". Fearing the Nazis, Madritsch denies. The film presents a notion that industrial tycoons such as those two represented a specific

portion of German nationals that were secretly against the Nazis and their policies towards the Jewish people, despite the fact that many industrials worked loyaly for the Nazis. But the withdrawal of Madritsch further enhances Schindler's heroism and establishes him as the good German that was able to make the difference; also, he could be perceived as a triumphant American businessman, which made capitalism, in the form of his enamelware factory, "a haven for orphans and rabis".

REPRESENTATION IN *VALKYRIE*

Valkyrie presents an account of the Bomb Plot of July 20th, 1944, when German politicians and army officers formed a conspiracy to kill Adolf Hitler. The bomb that was supposed to explode inside Hitler's war bunker was delivered by the film's protagonist, German colonel Klaus von Stauffenberg (Tom Cruise). The film addresses the story as a thriller, with well located heroic conspirators and villanous Nazi characters. The film's plot already indicates its difference from the films of the 1980s analyzed in the previous chapter of this dissertation, as the heroes in *Valkyrie* are members of the Nazi world. It was directed by Bryan Singer, who was responsible for the Nazi-theme drama *Apt Pupil* (1998), two *X–Men* films (2000, 2003), and *Superman Returns* (2006). The analysis will be based on three sequences regarding the actions of Stauffenberg, always portrayed as a hero. The first one is his introduction in the very beginning of the film, already presented as a resister, a German patriot and a moral person outraged at the horrors committed by the Nazis; in the second sequence, Stauffenberg participates in the draft of Operation Valkyrie, where he states his intention to shut down all concentration camps once Hitler is dead; the third sequence presents his attempt on Hitler. A minor sequence, depicts Stauffenberg's contempt for the Nazis, as he makes the Nazi salute in an unusual manner.

The Wehrmacht Against Hitler

The first image that appears in the film presents words in German, that are shuffled and translated into English: "The Following is based on a True Story", pretending to present some

authenticity for the narrative that follows. The name of the film likewise first appears German (*Walküre*), shifting to English (*Valkyrie*). The first sound to be heard is the German Army Oath of Allegiance to Adolf Hitler: an indistinct number of German soldiers speak loud and clear how the German soldier is willing to do everything and to die for the Führer (00:00:58). An image of the swastika banner then appears and fades off.

The first sequence is set in a location at the North African desert. An establishing shot, from right to left, gives the audience the first image, presenting a caption stating that the German 10th Panzer Division is on campaign. The camera moves from an armored vehicle to Stauffenberg's tent. As in most of his previous films, the expectations towards the star will be fulfilled, as he plays the scene according to his Hollywood type: a hero and a resister against Hitler's regime. Dressed as a soldier, Stauffenberg is seen writing in his journal, narrating in a voice–over in German, under a lamp that gives light to the tent and to the scene. The image fades to the light, which occupies the full screen. This could mean that Stauffenberg has some light to shine over Hitler's reign of darkness. Set in the desert, the photographic tone of the scene is yellow and blue, evocating the end of the night.

Figs. 25 and 26: Stauffenberg writes down his disapproval of Hitler's regime

Stauffenberg states that the German army is horrified by the atrocities committed by the SS, which stain the army's honor, here detached from the crimes committed by Nazi Germany. Lighting is over the main character's face, but his surroundings are photographed in black; the scene cuts to Cruise's face while

he speaks against Nazi crimes (00:02:25); the camera angle is low, shooting from below. In this moment the voice–over's sound is mixed: the German language fades and becomes English. Cruise's face is in close–up when he immediatly speaks in English about "the mass execution of Jews" (00:02:27). He speaks with complete disaproval about other crimes committed by the Nazis: the assassination of civilians and the starvation, torture and killing of prisoners of war.

The camera focuses on the character's left eye, looking down in an extreme close–up, as if he could be thinking on how to solve the problem of Hitler and the Nazis. At this point he says that his purpose is no more to save his country but human lives instead. A soldier suddenly enters and Stauffenberg closes his journal with a swift move. The soldier informs him that a general has arrived, Stauffenberg thanks him and says that he needs to talk with this general. Stauffenberg takes his journal and raises, while the camera tracks him as he looks down at a portrait of Hitler. Stauffenberg's face and this portrait are shown in an intercut montage, as the character looks down, somehow suggesting that he could be a moral authority superior to Hitler. He looks spitefully, saying that Hitler is not only the archenemy of the whole world, but also of Germany (00:03:09). He also argues that Germany and its Army are both victims to the Nazi State, something that is highly controversial. The first scene shows the Army's loyalty oath, and this theme of complicity is evoked in some moments during the film. Nevertheless, the apparent contradiction is resolved when a character states that the Army was also betrayed and the oath has no value anymore. The sequence is important, because it presents Stauffenberg already as a rebellious hero, someone who from the very beginning sets himself against the Nazis. From now on, the character will swiftly search for opportunities to undertake what he sees as a task to save Germany from Hitler. He soon will take his part with the conspirators in the plot to kill Hitler. But first he is wounded in action, and loses his left eye and his right hand during an English air raid.

When Stauffenberg has joined the conspirators' circle, several of them have already been presented in the film. The presence of Stauffenberg in the conspirators's circle appears to indicate unity. The conspirators are generals Henning von Tresckow (Kenneth Branagh), Erich von Witzleben (David

Schoefield), Friedrich Olbricht (Bill Nighy) and colonel Mertz von Quirnheim (Christian Berkel, the only German actor); and politicians Ludwig Beck (Terence Stamp) and Carl Goerdeler (Kevin McNally). Stauffenberg's personal aid, Lieutenant Werner von Haften (Jamie Parker), is another member. The conspirators belong to a group that was to be known as Kreisau Circle. Once Stauffenberg is invited to join, he takes a very dynamic and active role in conducting the whole operation. Fellow conspirator Ludwig Beck argues that one of the main objectives of the plot is to stop more than five years of destruction of Europe caused by the Third Reich. This is the tone of the film, in which responsibility for the war, and for the Holocaust likewise, is bestowed solely upon the Nazis, not identified with Germans. Germany is considered as another victim, like all the other countries that have sustained the Nazi war and destruction so far. At first, Stauffenberg hesitates to take part in the conspiracy; but during an air raid that threatens his family, he convinces himself of the need to kill Hitler.

Drafting "Valkyrie"

The plot begins to take shape (00:32:16) when Stauffenberg and general Tresckow are reunited to draft the Valkyrie plan that Hitler will be asked to sign. The plan deals with the instructions to be followed if Hitler is killed and will be altered to include the conspirators, who will then be in a legal position inside the new regime after Hitler's death. The sequence takes place at night, in a wooded location, outside the urban area and under a bridge.

Figs. 27 and 28: Stauffenberg and Tresckow drafting the Valkyrie plan

The sequence is full of suspense, and the shots focus mainly the two characters' faces. They speak in low voices, adding to the sense of suspense, about the plan's general lines: Valkyrie demands the formation of a new government six hours after Hitler's death, but is rewritten to make it done in three instead, and with complete support by the Army. In the film, one of Stauffenberg's first actions will be the immediate shutdown of all concentration camps, which is an important moment when the Holocaust is addressed, following the first scene in the tent (00:32:57). The plan will also blame the SS for the bomb, and accusing it of staging a coup, which will lead to the preemptive arrest of several key SS leaders. The Army Reserve, commanded by general Friedrich Fromm, will take control of all military districts. Tresckow speaks of the story of Sodom and Gomora: God would spare the cities if one good man could be found; thus the characters put themselves in the position of redeemers of Germany. The sequence, lighted in dark colors to evoke secrecy, also presents the necessity of saving Germany, once more identified as a victim to Nazi actions. Stauffenberg is presented as an anti–Nazi character the same as Schindler, and also as a moral hero against the Holocaust. As stated by Niven, his character is someone "who deserves an 'iconic status', because he "has to be seen to respond to the Holocaust" (Niven 191).

The plan is presented to Hitler for his signature (00:36:38). High–ranking Nazis are seen in this scene: Goebbels, Speer, Hess, SS chief Himmler, Göering, and Nazi Army general Wilhelm Keitel. The music in this scene is tense, as the Nazis stare at Stauffenberg with contempt, but Hitler is easily convinced and signs the new draft. Fromm accompanies Stauffenberg during the whole scene, and states his personal reason to let the plan take its curse: to get revenge from Keitel, whom he hates.

Stauffenberg's Anti–Nazi Salute

The film presents Stauffenberg as a major opponent to Nazism. There is a scene that misuses on purpose a gesture that is a key component of Nazi identity: the raised salute with the right arm. The film demonstrates Stauffenberg's status as an anti–Nazi by having him do the salute with his maimed limb; obeying an

order by general Fromm, he raises his arm to prove his loyalty but his hand is missing; the salute is ineffective, making clear Stauffenberg's judgment about Hitler, Nazism and its policies.

Fig. 29: General Friedrich Fromm Fig. 30: Stauffenberg's salute

This sequence presents General Fromm's ambiguity towards the conspiracy, and portrays Stauffenberg as a radical anti–Nazi, who also at first refuses to present a Nazi salute. Fromm is dual: he never presents himself as a fanatic Nazi character, but he doubts the effectiveness of the conspiracy. He knows from the beginning what is happening but chooses to stand aside, waiting for things to occur before making his decision. The next scene shows how a first assassination attempt on Hitler fails after Himmler does not appear; since he is the SS main leader, the conspirators want him to die as well. The film presents an elaborate sequence showing what will happen in case the plan succeeds: after the explosion, Fromm, Goebells and several SS officers will be arrested and Olbricht will assume command of the Reserve Army and launch Valkyrie; Goerdeler will be appointed the new chancellor to negotiate a truce with the Allies, saving Europe from total destruction (00:46:11). The Germans are presented as the people who have the power to end the war. Beck states the need to save Germany, regarded as "sacred", by overthrowing Nazism. After Stauffenberg's departure for the Führer's bunker, the Reserve Army is released in Berlin under Olbricht orders, commander in the city by major Otto Remer; after a while, he and his men are recalled under the excuse of a simple drill. Then Fromm notices what happened and questions Stauffenberg's loyalty, prompting the maimed salute scene.

The Coup

The film's final act presents the sequence of the attempt against Hitler. Stauffenberg shaves, the camera focusing his neck, when he voluntarily cuts himself with a razor blade. A small drop of blood stains his white shirt. The white cloth with the red stain over may identify martyrdom (01:02:17); the character presents himself as someone willing to die to save Germany. The camera closes in Stauffenberg's lightly wounded neck over the white shirt, which could be read as a symbol of sacrifice but also an excuse if the character needs a place to change his shirt, and to prepare the explosive. The scene allows such reading, due to the mortal risk the character is facing by being the one selected to deliver the bomb.

The sequence is suspenseful. It begins in the early moments of July 20th, 1944. Stauffenberg departs to Hitler's headquarters with his aide. The camera pans over the moving car; the non–diegetic music is tense and evokes suspense over the upcoming attempt. The sequence is edited with scenes depicting other conspirators, waiting for the order to start Valkyrie. Stauffenberg arrives, asks for a place to change clothes and immediately begins to prepare the bomb. The montage is very fast and the characters move very quickly, their movements and state of mind underscored by the fast pace of the editing (01:04:45). The characteristics of the action thriller follows: the film's suspense reaches a climax when an officer tries to enter the room while Stauffenberg is still preparing the bomb and is almost caught; he swiftly pushes the door while still holding the bomb and dimisses the officer. When everything is set, Haeften is dismissed and Stauffenberg follows another officer to the bunker. The music is intense and darker when he is informed that the reunion will not happen in the concrete bunker that would maximize the bomb's effect, but in a wooden hut, because of the heat. This is a major problem to the narrative, as the bomb's effectiveness will be diminished; the camera focuses on Stauffenberg look of concern, but he continues with the plan. Thus, he may be understood as a corageous character.

Arriving at the wooden hut, Stauffenberg is again introduced to Hitler, to whom he looks with contempt and superiority. He begins to look startled, waiting for a fellow conspirator to call him, which will allow him to exit. He leaves to

answer to the phone call, but the suitcase containing the bomb is moved away from Hitler's position. The briefing continues until the bomb goes off (01:11:15); the velocity of the film slows to depict the explosion. The films' sound in this moment is huge, drawing complete attention to the action. The Nazis react rapidly to the explosion, and Stauffenberg uses this opportunity to escape. He does not know for sure if Hitler actually died, but the camera registers his expression in a close up, smiling with fierce pride and confidence, while the car rushes to take him to the airport and back to Berlin (01:12:10).
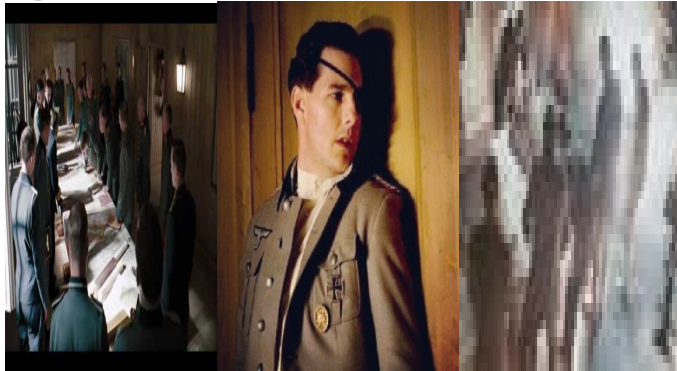
Figs. 31 to 33: The sequence that depicts the attempt against Hitler

The film portrays Stauffenberg as the savior of Germany: "the screenplay and *mise–en–scène* play up the role of Stauffenberg in the preparation of Operation Valkyrie, attributing only to him (and not to the other conspirators, who remain pale) the necessary moral vision and dedication required for a successful tyrannicide and coup" (Niven 182). Hollywood elevates the character as a great hero with an iconic personality: "never has there been a more idolizing portrayal of Stauffenberg as the one provided in Singer's film" (182). Nazism and the Holocaust are set as the actions of a well located group of tyrants, and Germans in general are victims: "the early portrayal of Stauffenberg in the film focused on the suffering of civilians on the German homefront, and therefore Germans are portrayed as victims. Stauffenberg's actions are contextualized as a consequence of Hitler's irresponsible military actions towards the German army." (A. White 01). Regarding the character,

"Stauffenberg appears then as a traditional self–sacrificing Christ figure who atones for the sins of the German people left in his wake" (01).

Despite the fact that the conspirators were a group of conservative, aristocratic and nationalist people, something that Stauffenberg was as well; "his family was Catholic and belonged to the ancient Swabian nobility. His father was a high–ranking official in the court of Wurttenberg and later became Marshall of the Court to King Wilhelm II of Wurttenberg" (Hoffman 315). The film tries hard to construct the idea that he was willing to die as a martyr of Germany. Such reading does not fit historical records, but is compatible with Cruise's acting persona, usually identified with larger–than–life heroes.

The depiction of the main character by a movie star famous for portraying heroes in Hollywood films appears to legitimize the film's representation: "it has taken an American production and Tom Cruise to provide the smooth heroicization and 'globalization' of the figure of a German soldier as resister" (Niven 182). By using Cruise's popularity, the film intends to create a major account of a historical fact and of a hero who presents himself as a moral voice against Nazism, who disapproves of the murder of the Jewish people and serves also as an anti–nazi martyr. Nevertheless, Júlio Bezerra has stated that the film presents "good and evil, heroes and criminals, black and white, without gray areas, development, or social context. As we know, Stauffenberg supported the antisemitic regime and was always in favor of the armed conflict in Europe" (17). Enters the stars, and "in the guise of Cruise, however, he transforms himself into a humanist, an impeccable figure, determined to eliminate Hitler for the benefit of his Germany" (Bezerra, 17, my translation).[1]

But in the case of *Valkyrie*, the heroes are also German, and not American or British; thus, the film appears to be less a German narrative and more an American one, but with a story

[1] "bons e maus, heróis e criminosos, preto e branco, sem intermédios, desenvolvimento, nem contexto social. Como sabemos, Stauffenberg apoiava o regime antissemita e sempre esteve a favor do conflito armado na Europa. Na pele de Cruise, no entanto, ele se transforma em um humanista, uma figura impecável, decidido a eliminar Hitler pelo bem de sua Alemanha" (Bezerra 17).

that aims to appeal to the customary Hollywood audience. Cruise's presence may enhance this idea. Filmmaker Bryan Singer and "his screenwriters made use of the frustrated murder attempt on July 20th, 1944 as a basis for a history more connected with the ideological stereotypes of the Bush Era than with the Germany of the 40's" (17). Bezerra argues that "the question imposes itself once more: what was the interest to the director of the film? To speak about Nazism or about a conspiracy for a coup d'etat? In the first case, the film is bad and shameful; in the second, why Nazi Germany?" (Bezerra 17, my translation).[2]

There are some ways to understand the film's choice to represent a coup in Nazi Germany. Ashley Brett Kaplan's criticism has stated that "in the popular imaginary, interest in perpetrators as objects of study and fascination has been increasing" (274). She argues that "among many examples from recent years, consider the filmic adaptation in 2008 of Bernhard Schlink's novel *The Reader* (1995), starring Kate Winslet as the Nazi at the center of the story; and another film of the same year, *Valkyrie*, which starred Tom Cruise as Claus von Stauffenberg, the "good" Nazi whose failed attempt to assassinate Hitler is the film's subject" (Kaplan 274).

Regarding the Holocaust and the Nazi regime, *Valkyrie* follows a pattern that was already seen in *Schindler's List*, and at least in part may appear again in *The Reader*: "these films and novels offer glimpses through the (fictional) perpetrator's eyes; one could argue that the very fact of having such known actors as Kate Winslet and Tom Cruise play Nazis encourages a sort of identification with Nazi characters" (274). The context of production and release of Valkyrie must be understood: it has been argued that in Germany "a spokesman for the German protestant church went so far as to say Cruise's involvement would 'have the same propaganda advantages for scientology as the 1936 Olympics had for the Nazis'. Stories circulated that

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[2] "seus roteiristas se utilizaram da frustrada tentativa de assassinato do dia 20 de julho de 1944 como base para uma história mais afinada com os estereótipos ideológicos da era Bush do que com a Alemanha dos anos 40. A pergunta se impõe novamente: o que afinal mais interessava ao diretor do filme? Falar sobre o nazismo, ou sobre uma conspiração para um golpe de estado? Se o primeiro, o filme é ruim e vergonhoso; se o segundo, por que a Alemanha nazista?" (Bezerra 17).

filming had been hampered by restrictions, with permission to shoot at Berlin's Benderblock initially denied" (Bell 08). Cruise's project was met with care at first: "a relative of Stauffenberg was quoted as saying, 'I fear that only terrible kitsch will come out of this project' (08). Bell also argues that the "first half of the film is careful to explain the background influences that led Stauffenberg and the other members of the resistance to risk the assassination attempt" (08). This was because "there was a strong class aspect to the resistance. Men like Stauffenberg were drawn from the aristocratic Prussian military class and viewed the Nazis as a bunch of thugs led by a lowly Austrian corporal" (08). The difference between good–hearted soldiers driven by moral issues against what was perceived as corrupt politicians was highlighted as well by director Bryan Singer. He said that "Stauffenberg came from a 900–year old family who had served kings". Singer also stated that "he had great pride in the longevity of Germany as a great nation. These people were not Nazis, they had never been party members" (08).

The star system must be considered, since the film stars Tom Cruise, and he would portray the character as a hero, an idealized view about Stauffenberg and of his role during the coup. But the casting by Singer was also questioned: was he "worried that such a complex figure would be smothered by the star baggage Tom Cruise inevitably brings to any film?" (08). The director answered by saying that "we made a conscious effort for Tom to give a contained performance, to embrace the reputation for calm, cool grace under pressure that Stauffenberg had. The action and the deed are so great that the performance should be as contained as possible" (08). Cruise is not the only superstar in the film. Many of the characters are played by familiar English–speaking actors, perhaps to ease the public's identification with the conspirators: "alongisde Cruise is a who's who of heavyweight British talent: Kenneth Brannagh, Terence Stamp, Tom Wilkinson and an unusually restrained Bill Nighy among them" (08). On the other hand, the "evil Nazis" are played by Germans. Bryan Singer defended his casting choices: "I was looking for the best actors and I have a history with British actors like Patrick Stewart and Ian McKellen" (09). Dealing with a very sensitive theme, the film was met with care by the German press: "early previews of the film have met with a mixed response from German critics, with many claiming that Cruise's performance

fails to capture Stauffenberg's aristocratic bearing, but Singer has shown it to members of Stauffenberg's family, who expressed their approval" (09).

The film's problematic theme and potential for polemics was considered. Criticism was directed against the film's superstar, partly because of his connection with Scientology: "some Germans criticized the choice of Cruise for lead actor. They pointed out that Stauffenberg was one of Germany's heroes of the Nazi era" (Toplin 1020). German people have "said it was insulting that Cruise, a Scientologist, would represent the heroic figure on the silver screen. They characterized Scientology as a cult and a business that preys on vulnerable people" (Toplin 1020).

By creating a German character in the role of a major resister, the film may be understood in the context of the memorialization of German Resistance against Nazism and its policies. Stauffenberg is a national hero, reminding Germans that their own people rose against Hitler and his allies. Thus, the issue of German Resistance by Germans lies as the core in the film's narrative. Stauffenberg was one of many resisters among the military and the civilians during the Nazi Age, and *Valkyrie* is Hollywood's first blockbuster film with a major star to be made about Stauffenberg's story. The bomb coup was recreated on screen in other German and American theatrical and television films, such as *Operation Walkure* (1971), *The Plot to Kill Hitler* (1990), and *Stauffenberg* (2004), but never before with such a star as Tom Cruise.

The resistance against Hitler and Nazism is a very sensitive theme in Germany and the film may be considered an effort to recover one of such stories. The redemption of the German Army may be a controversial theme as well, considering its role with the Nazis during the War and the Holocaust. Since its first sequence, the film makes an effort to separate the army from responsibility for the mass killings, thus separating the Wehrmacht from the SS on the basis of a moral action. Nevertheless, the German Army actions were marked by strict collaborationism with the SS and the extermination policy since the beginning of the war: "the indiscriminate killings of Jews by Lithuanian units and the Einsatzkommandos happened under military rule and illustrate the close cooperation between Einsatzgruppen and the Wehrmacht" (Schoeps 492). Although

they were different institutions, the relation between the SS and the German Army was of cooperation: "although military commanders usually left the killing of Jews to the SS and related units, they praised the good cooperation with the Wehrmacht" (493).

The SS is a force usually remembered as mainly responsible for the death camps' administration, meanwhile there is an effort to present the regular army units as patriots fighting for Germany, not for Hitler. This is what Cruise's Stauffenberg argues during the film's first moments. Nevertheless, Army generals such as Walter von Reichenau, were fanatical Nazis who obediently complied with the Holocaust. Reichenau "complained that a large portion of his forces did not have a clear idea that this was no ordinary war but a war against a Jewish-Bolshevik system" (497) in which "the German soldier must not only be a skilled fighter but also the representative of a rigid volkish idea' who 'understands the harsh but just measures taken against the Jewish subhumans" (497).

There were some minor and innefective points of resistance inside the Army: although "many soldiers of the Wehrmacht were disgusted by the crimes committed by the *Einsatzgruppen*, only very few of them came to the aid of those persecuted by the SS. Among them were Major Karl Plagge and Sergeant Anton Schmid" (497). Plagge and Schmid are other resisters such as Stauffenberg, as they acted against Nazism racial motivations. Stauffenberg, as we have seen, was made famous by his attempt on Hitler, but the others tried to save Holocaust victims. Plagge "rejected the arrogant and haughty behavior as well as the unscientific feeling of racial superiority of many party members" (497). He was as well "disgusted by the persecution of Jews and he had a number of confrontations with Nazi officials who accused him of being friends with Jews and those married to Jews" (498). While Stauffenberg's action was more political in nature, Plagge's efforts had a humanitarian perspective. One of many career officers without direct access to Hitler, he tried to save Jews of the Lithuanian Gehtto of Vilnius: "surviving witnesses compared him to Oscar Schindler" (498). One particular survivor recalled that "major Plagge was better than Schindler [...] he made no money. He did it only to help his Jews" (498). Plagge is one among very few Germans to be remembered as a rescuer during the Holocaust, and this may account for

Stauffenberg's heroicization as well. Germans have few of their own to be reminded as resisters, and such efforts are always remembered with praise: "on 11 April of 2005 Plagge was recognized by the State of Israel as one of the 'Righteous Among the Nations' and his name is now being displayed in Yad Vashem. Up to that date there were only 410 Germans among the 20,205 honorees, and of those only very few Germans in uniform" (499).

Stauffenberg is an active resister who speaks briefly against the Holocaust in the film, but he was not the only one to have done so. Sergeant Anton Schmid "is probably the most remarkable of all the rescuers in Wehrmacht uniform in that he not only sought to protect Jews but took an active part in Jewish resistance against the Nazis. His actions helped to instigate ghetto uprisings not only in Vilnius but also in Bialystock and Warsaw" (501). Schmid tried to act as Schindler did. He had a workshop in which he "employed cabinetmakers, carpenters, and upholsterers; up to January 1942, a total of 103 Jewish men and women. He also procured the much sought-after 'yellow papers,' known in the ghetto as 'leave from death papers,' which were intended to save his workers and their families from SS raids" (502). Schmid's mission was not successful as Schindler's: his "rescue mission came to an abrupt halt when, in February of 1942, he was arrested, tried by a German military court, sentenced to death, and executed on 13 April 1942" (502). During his actions, he may have been more active than Schindler and Stauffenberg, deciding "to do more than just protect Jews where he could. He established contact with Jewish resistance groups in the ghetto" even going to the extent of using "his apartment in Vilnius as a safe haven for Jewish partisans where they could rest and plot their activities with advice from Schmid" (502). The behavior of German people in the case is also very emblematic of the general Nazi feeling and helps to underline the country's traumatic past, as Schmid's wife told "that after her husband's death, neighbors had berated her as the wife of a traitor and had attempted to expel her from the neighborhood by smashing her windows" (505). Schmid's reabilitation came late and may serve as a symptom of Germany's necessity of cherishing their resisters: "on 8 May 2000 (the 55th anniversary of the end of World War II), in the presence of Johannes Rau, the German Federal President, and Rudolf Scharping, the minister of defense, a Bundeswehr

barracks in Rendsburg in Northern Germany were renamed Sergeant Schmid barracks" (505). German mentality may have been directed to remember History as at least some form of redeeming the past: "it was the first time in the history of the Bundeswehr that barracks were not named after a Wehrmacht general but after a simple Wehrmacht soldier and even one who was executed for high treason" (505). The number of known resisters against the Holocaust in Germany is so few indeed that Rudolf Scharping's "speech illustrates how sensitive it was even in the year 2000 to honor a 'traitor': 'We are not at liberty in the choice of our history but we are free to decide which tradition to select from this history. In this we Germans have a more difficult time than other nations.'" (505).

The importance of reminding and commemorating a Wehrmacht soldier's actions against the Nazis and the Holocaust lies at the core of Germany's trauma. Very few resisted indeed, and this may be a matter of shame among Germany's people and its institutions: "in comparison to the total number of soldiers in the German Wehrmacht, the number of those who helped and saved people persecuted by the Nazi regime is miniscule" (506). Others such as Albert Battel and Max Liedtke are among the very few soldiers to act against the Holocaust; there is also SS officer Kurt Gerstein, who was the subject of Costa Gavras's film *Amen* (2002). Finally, there was Navy officer Oskar Kusch, convicted and executed for making negative remarks about the Hitler Youth organization: "he is proof of the fact that there were servicemen in the Wehrmacht who performed their difficult duty for their fatherland but not for its National Socialist rulers. This makes him a model for future generations of German officers" (Walle 345). This is what *Valkyrie* could be seen as trying to advance: resistance against Hitler in the German army was rare, but it did exist. What Stauffenberg and a few others did is not enough to redeem Germany; it is possible to see that many conspirators had been Nazis, and who were deeply involved in crimes against Jews, civilians, and prisoners of war. But Stauffenberg can be paired among Battel, Liedtke, Kusch and some others as a symbol of defiance, whose stories can be remembered, stating that just a few militaries were capable of standing against the Nazi regime by the cost of their own lives.

One of the few survivors of the failed conspiracy was Wehrmacht officer Phillip Freiherr von Boeselager. His memoir

book about operation Valkyrie pretends to be "the true history of the film starring Tom Cruise", as the book's cover states. The author says that neither he nor any of his fellows officers ever became a Nazi militant (19). The idea that the Army was an institution somehow immune to Nazi influence appears throughout the book. The author states that to be in the Army was a means one could dispose to serve the country, but not the regime (25). He argues that "the curriculum of the officers was completely apolitical" (27) and first mentions the Anti–Jewish policies stating that they were a source of concern for the officers (29). There is a keen effort to completely separate the actions of the Army from those of the SS. The author tries to get rid of the notion that the Army was involved in atrocities, and creates a narrative of absolution and redemption for the Army, constantly addressing the issue of victimization of Germany. Nevertheless, there are moments when he falls in contradiction: he states that "there were few examples in Germany, at least among the military, of spontaneous and impulsive engagement in the struggle against the regime" (67). But even if he recognizes that active resistance was small, he states that the Army was outraged by the knowledge of crimes, as Stauffenberg does in the film. He mentions to first know about summary executions of Jews and Gypsies around the spring of 1942, done exclusively by the SS (82–83). The policy against the Jewish is presented as a major secret, in contradiction to the first scene in Cruise's film. The expression "Holocaust" never appears in the book. Tresckow is even described as someone who tried to create some embarassements for the SS by prohibiting the concentration of civilians in his jurisdiction, thus hampering the actions related to the extermination process. Although this is difficult to imagine, since the Wehrmacht and the SS were independent and operated with complete autonomy from each other, the author tries to present the conspirators as active anti–Holocaust resisters.

The representation of the Soviets by the author appears as one of the main problems in the book. The author states that "we would pretend to preserve at all costs the conquests thanks to a separated peace with the Americans and the British, that would allow us to impose harsher conditions for the Soviets, throwing over them the whole war effort" (Boeselager 104). The Soviets are presented as supreme enemies that need be vanquished for the benefit of Germany. Sections as such present an idea more of an

heroic resistance carried out by German troops against an evil enemy, and less one of a conspiracy against Hitler, despite the author's claims. Stauffenberg appears very little in the text, and his first appearance is late, first mentioned as the one who received the suitcase where the bomb was supposed to be taken (145).

Von Boeselager says that he actually participated in the conspiracy in a very limited and secondary form, that may have been very safe for him (154). The attempt itself is not described; the author remains an outsider, narrating the events from a safe distance. Several characters he mentions as key conspirators do not appear in the film (Boeselager 169–170). The general purpose of the book appears to be the creation of a narrative that aims to present a moment of hope during the Nazi years, where the Army is absolved and the embarrassing issue of the Holocaust is barely mentioned, and when it is, Boeselager's reaction is the same as Stauffenberg's: disapproval and outrage.

Tobias Kniebe's *Operation Valkyrie* follows the same idea, the one that identifies the Russians as mortal enemies deserving no mercy: Kniebe says that Stauffenberg "hoped to avoid at least a defeat in the Eastern Front through the concentration of forces. As it occurs with most German officers, the fear of being invaded by the bolsheviks frozed his blood" (52, my translation).[3] Stauffenberg is recognized as part of the German aggression: his division participates in the invasions of France and Poland (50), and his view of other peoples does not differ from the National–Socialist one: "the people are an incredible rabble, many Jews and many mixed peoples. A people that certainly only feel well under the whip. The thousands of prisoners will do very well to our agriculture" (75, my translation).[4] Kniebe's Stauffenberg differs from the one portrayed by Cruise's. The author states that Stauffenberg was an enthusiast of the "Western Solution": the

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[3] "Esperava evitar pelo menos uma derrota no front oriental mediante uma concentração de forças. Como ocorre com a maioria dos oficiais alemães, o medo de ser invadido pelos bolcheviques gelava seu sangue" (Kniebe 52).

[4] "A população é uma turba incrível, muitos judeus e muitas gente misturada. Um povo que com certeza só se sente bem sob chicote. Os milhares de prisioneiros farão muito bem a nossa agricultura" (Kniebe 75).

end of the war in the West that would allow Germany to concentrate against the Soviets, a theme probably strong among the military, as also mentioned by Boeselager. This appears to be one of the main reasons regarding Stauffenberg's joining the plot: "all troops of the German reserve would be free to face the Russians in the frontiers of the Reich on the Eastern Front" (Kniebe 151, my translation).[5] The theme of Germany's victimization is also addressed: the plot's death caused to die "the hope of stopping a man's and a system's lunacy that would survive ten months, in which he would send more human beings to death than in all previous years" (249, my translation).[6] The use of the verb "send" may appear ambiguous. Kniebe never speaks about the Holocaust. He probably denounces Hitler's intentions of sending more German soldiers to die in vain. But this does not matter, because by the time of the coup, the Holocaust had already reached its peak, and most of the victims were already dead. The author retrieves operation Valkyrie as a memoir of German resistance caused by its victimization, disconsidering the atrocities against other people by the Nazis. The way Boeselager and Kniebe represent the Soviets may indicate that they at least shared some notions defended by Nazi propaganda.

The whole operation is presented by both authors as a stupendous failure: soon after the bomb explodes, Hitler is neither dead, nor even gravely injured (189). The supposed interest by other military in joining the coup was perhaps overestimated: from all the military districts, only the one in Paris appeared to have demonstrated more enthusiasm (238). The film nevertheless prefers to exaggerate its scope, representing the Army as an integrated body that owns no more loyalty to Hitler, instead of showing all major German districts rapidly joining the coup. Remer's character could be a problem: the film presents him as an unwilling participant, responsible for the military deployment in Berlin and for the arrest of key Nazi figures. Remer is outraged when he acknowledges how he was deceived, but he vanishes

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[5] "Todas as tropas da reserva alemã estariam livres para enfrentar os russos nas fronteiras do Reich do front oriental" (Kniebe 151).

[6] "a esperança de deter a loucura de um homem e de um sistema que sobreviverá dez meses, nos quais ele enviará mais seres humanos à morte que em todos os anos de guerra anteriores" (Kniebe 249).

from the scene quickly enough not to stain the military honor: "Remer became an activist of right–wing parties. Always speaks proudly about his role in the July 20th coup and, despite many convictions and detentions, he never ceases to deny the Holocaust and to injure the memory of the resistance's combatants" (266).[7] In the film, Remer's participation falls to the minimum. The film's star is Cruise–Stauffenberg, becoming the center of a resistance movement that positioned not only as a movement seeking Hitler's removal, but as one that acknowledged and condemned the major traumatic event of the Holocaust.

   Operation Valkyrie was also presented as "the story containing the details behind the true story that inspired the film" in Jesus Hernandez's book. He states that the Allies may have had no interest to "let arise the activities undertaken by the resistance against the Nazi regime" (10), something that the film does portray. Nevertheless, by stating that the Army was always against the Führer could have been a mistake committed by the film: "the first victories of Hitler's aggressive foreign policy, refrained by great military conquests obtained during the struggle's first phases, managed that most part of the Army would maintain its fidelity to the Führer" (36). The first major movements of resistance did not start inside the Army, but with common civilians, such as Communists, the Swing Kids[8] from Hamburg, and the White Rose's students movement.[9] Hans and Sophie Scholl, the White Rose main leaders, were swiftly condemned and executed under orders of Nazi judge Roland Freisler, the same one who would convict the bomb plot conspirators.

   Hernandez also states that Stauffenberg was not the idealized hero the film pretends to create from its first image: Stauffenberg took an active part in the invasion of

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[7] Remer tornou–se ativista de partidos de extrema direita. Sempre fala com orgulho de seu papel no golpe de 20 de julho e, a despeito de diversas condenações e detenções, nunca deixa de negar o Holocausto e de injuriar a memória dos combatentes da resistência" (Kniebe 266).

[8] This movement, composed of Black and Jewish swing music fans, is the theme of a 1993's film, starring Christian Bale and *Valkyrie*'s Kenneth Branagh – this time, playing a Nazi villain.

[9] The White Rose resistance movement is the subject of German film *Sophie Scholl: Die Letzte Tage* (2004).

Tchecoslovakia, Poland and France (77–79). But regarding Stauffenberg, "it is well likely that after becoming a historical character, people from his circle would make a hero of him unconsciously" (89). Hernandez states that "we cannot discard the possibility that someone would remind something that could damage Stauffenberg's reputation and would choose to forget or to not report to not harm his character" (89). Stauffenberg was thus conceived or represented previously as the symbol of the Army's resistance and of Germany's as a whole disapproval of the Nazi regime. For the German military, the issue of separating the Army from the SS is of strong interest. Himmler's SS was the chief perpetrator of all major Nazi atrocities, such as the Holocaust. Though all Nazi agencies were dissolved after the war, the Army nevertheless persisted as an institution, and was in need of a new representation, one that could distance itself from the previous regime. The bomb plot serves as a redeeming narrative of both Germany and the Army, but remains as a set of events that is very hard to reconstruct (98). What matters is to create a narrative such as the one advanced by the film, where the good Germans inside the noble and conscientious institution of the Army manifest their contempt for the criminal Nazi regime and act against Hitler.

The narrative in the film's representation appears to follow the idea of the "Clean Wehrmacht", a theme that was defended by historians such as Ernest Nolte and Andreas Hillgruber. Nolte created a historical narrative that never denies the reality of the Holocaust, but instead focuses upon the Wehrmacht heroism in the Eastern Front and the victimization of German nationals at the hands of the Red Army soldiers. These choices may actually signal a process of identity formation during the Post–War era in Germany, that was concerned with "the project and dilemma of elaborating a post–Holocaust German national and cultural identity" (Santner 145). Nolte's project of History and representation identifies with the Wehrmacht soldiers who were fighting the Russian invaders. The problem is that the German soldiers' stiff resistance was something that "allowed for the machinery of the death camps to continue unabated" (148). Nolte prefers not to address the Holocaust, instead separating the event from the actions of the front line soldiers. In his representation, "the Wehrmacht becomes the heroic defender of the victims threatened by the Soviet onslaught" (148). Given the

circumstances, choosing to fight for Hitler or to fight for Germany, as Stauffenberg mentions early in the film, would have the same result: to allow the Holocaust to go on.

The German army appears in the film following the tradition of the apolitical "not-Nazi" fighting force, clearly separated from the SS in ideology; the Army is also depicted as disconnected from the Holocaust and Anti–Semitic policies. As an institution that endured after the war and was a potential (and real) ally against the Russian Communists during the Cold War, the German army could have considered it advantageous to differentiate itself from the other Nazi agencies. Historical and popular memory both endorsed the notion that the entity mainly responsible for the atrocities against the Jews was the SS. According to Stauffenberg's statements in the film, the army was no more than a professional fighting force for Germany, not for Hitler.

Nevertheless, there are authors who have offered a perspective that contradicts the film's statement: "the German combat troops on the ground showed little reluctance, indeed often demonstrated much enthusiasm, in carrying out the 'criminal orders' issued by the regime and the high commander of the army" (Bartov 129). In this view, the difference between the army and the SS does not exist, since they served the same regime. The idea of the "clean Wehrmacht" was created after the war, to uphold a popular belief that regarding the Holocaust and other crimes, "the army was not involved in such actions and in many ways resisted them, or at least kept itself in a position of critical isolation from the more unsavory aspects of Nazi rule" (129). Bartov states that this is an erroneous view, and it is based actually on apologetic post–war literature created by German army veterans, such as Phillip von Boeselager. According to this view, it is possible to argue that Stauffenberg's story has been used as an example of how the German army stood against Hitler, was thus located against Nazism itself, and by extension, against the Holocaust and other Nazi criminal policies. Thus, the army manages to dissociate itself from the Holocaust. This process of "overcoming the past", as it is called in Germany, is a term that stands at first "for the complex confrontation between personal and collective memory (and its repression), on the one hand, and the memory (or amnesia) of individuals and groups belonging to other national entities" (Bartov 135). The film invests in this sort

of identification, trying to create an account or view of the "Wehrmacht as an army like any other", something that "is shared by many non–German scholars, especially in the West, and reflects a wider trend in public opinion" (137). The film may also legitimate this opinion, by reinforcing such identity, which is not new. President Ronald Reagan was a major Anti–Communist who showed sympathy for Germany. During a visit in Germany, where he made his "Tear Down This Wall Mr. Gorbachev" discourse at the Berlin Wall, he also visited the Bitburg Cemetery were members of the SS were buried. There he stated that "the soldiers of the Wehrmacht buried in the military cemetery of Bitburg were also victims of the Nazi regime" (137). Reagan came under fire for his visit and for his statement, but even if he was not well informed about the subject, such statement by the most powerful chief of State in the world is at least disturbing. Victimized or not, Bartov states that, in the end, "the German army must surely come out worse than any other modern army. This is both because the army itself actively pursued a policy of mass killing of Russians and because it was an essential instrument in the realization of the Final Solution" (139).

It is relevant to acknowledge that the film purposely misses one important detail about the issue of the Wehrmacht ideological separation from the SS, in respect to the bomb plot against Hitler. Two major conspirators are absent from the film's narrative. Army general Erich Hoepner was one the mentors of Stauffenberg's attempt. Hoepner was responsible for a scorched earth policy during his command in the Eastern Front. He wrote that Operation Barbarossa represented "the defense of European culture against Moscovite–Asiatic inundation, and the repulse of Jewish Bolshevism" (Mitcham 537). For Hoepner, the war in the East and the treatment of the Jews should "be conducted with unprecedented severity" (537), seemingly approving of the Holocaust. General Arthur Nebe's case is even worse: a member of the SS, he commanded a death squad in occupied Poland. Thus, the conspiracy against Hitler would not exclude "a good number of men profoundly implicated in the Regime's crimes" (Arendt 115). Nebe has been characterized as "a very questionable member of the Resistance circle at the time of the great bomb plot" (Reitlinger 182–183). Nebe's squad was responsible for the killing of about 46,000 Jewish victims (182–

183); other historians present a small variation about the number of victims, 45,000 (Heer and Naumann 129). But the fact is that Nebe was directly involved in the extermination process, showing that even someone who wanted to kill Hitler and end the regime could have been involved with horrendous crimes. After all, the conspiracy was to a great extent motivated by disapproval of Hitler's war record. Nevertheless, the film does its best to declare that disapproval of the Holocaust was also a major reason for the plot, without acknowledging Holocaust perpetrators such as Nebe, who also took part in the coup. Nebe was responsible for the creation of the first gas chamber prototypes: "Nebe came up with the idea of constructing a car with a hermetically sealed cabin for killing purposes. The carbon monoxide from the car's exhaust would be channeled into the sealed cabin, in which the victims stood" (Arad 10–11). The imminence of Germany's defeat after the Normandy landings could have played some part on the change of heart of some of these Nazis.

Crimes committed by some of the conspirators, especially those related to the Holocaust, may have influenced how the film's characters where chosen and how the story in itself was represented. Characters such as Nebe never appear in the film. Another problem is that even Stauffenberg himself was not the idolized version of the ideal German hero. He could have been at the very best ambivalent in his feeling about Hitler and the Nazi regime: "from expressions used by Stauffenberg, many of his colleagues concluded that he welcomed and supported the Nazi regime" (Hoffman 316). The timing of the conspiracy could come in for some criticism as well, since it was planned when Germany was already about to lose the war, and major criminals such as Nebe would be interested in surviving the war without punishment.

There is also the matter of German martyrdom presented in the film. The members of the resistance remain faithful to their ideals to the very end. Thus, both Germans and the Army achieve the status of sacrificial victims, proclaiming their detachment from the regime and their ultimate innocence of the crimes. They try to redeem Germany's memory through sacrifice and martyrdom, striving to become victims of Nazism, like the Jewish people who perished during the Holocaust, to whose benefit the

character of Stauffenberg rewrites the Valkyrie plan and seeks to shut down all concentration camps when it succeeds.

The film may function yet as a representation of American military heroism against Hitler. Nazis were always major villains in Hollywood films. Despite creating a less stereotyped version of German Nazis in the figure of Stauffenberg, the film's main hero is Tom Cruise, and his stardom is connected with his several "hero types" performed in previous films. Cruise's persona is familiar with the espionage and thriller formula, where a small group of heroes must overcome heavy odds in order to vanquish an evil enemy and save the world. The five *Mission: Impossible* films are perhaps the best examples for comparison with the *Valkyrie* narrative. In all films, he plays the hero, leads a small team of heroes, and risks his life to save the world. In *Valkyrie*, all major characters are performed by American or British well–known actors, reinforcing the identity of such characters as being actually "non–Nazi". Antagonist major Remer, who subdues and arrest the plotters, is performed by a German. The film can be read as a narrative where American and British dressed as Germans will risk and sacrifice to save Germany, kill Hitler, stop the war and the Holocaust, and bring peace to the world. Beck's speech about ending the years of destruction by killing Hitler may fit this interpretation. In this sense, the less stereotyped Germans could actually represent Americans in disguise.

Denying a totalizing perception of history, postmodern theory allows the construction of new representations of Germans and Germany, by recovering something morally good about the Germans during the years when Nazism was in power. Resistance in such case may be remembered and memorialized as an act of national identity for modern Germany: Hitler's "elimination in July or August 1944 would not have made any significant difference in the result of the war for Germany, except by providing a spurious explanation of the defeat" (Balfour 396). The recovery of the July plot, and that of others resisters and heroes may account for the kind of representation that Germany and its people may want to see. Alongside the construction of a positive identity regarding the troubled and traumatic Nazi past, there is also the issue of creating German heroes to which the country's people are able to identify.

The film may stand for a postmodern representation of Nazism, one that denies a grand narrative about Nazism,

replacing it with a minor, local story about a heroic German resister, which acknowledges that Germans can fight against Hitler and the Holocaust, putting themselves in a position to help and rescue the Jewish and Germany itself, stained by Nazism, but nevertheless sacred.

Through Cruise's status and interpretation, the film's Stauffenberg becomes a symbol and a representation of a Germany that is somehow different form the one presented in historical records and films about World War II. In this representation, Germany and Germans do not cope with National–Socialism or its leader and institutions devoted to the persecution and killing of Jewish people. They signal the possibility of a Germany that lived inside the borders of the Third Reich and has never stood for what one may acknowledge as the basis that defines the criminal character of the regime.

REPRESENTATION IN *THE READER*

Compared to *Schindler's List* or *Valkyrie*, *The Reader* (2008) goes deeper into the problem of relativization of a Nazi agent, and its projection of her status as a protagonist. The film also projects her role as a less stereotyped and perhaps more complex character. The film's protagonist Hanna Schmitz is directly involved in the mass murder of Jews. She is seen in the first part of the film as the lover of young student Michael Berg, who reads books and letters to her. The memory of Michael and Hanna's relation is deeply disturbed by the crime's revelation in the film's second part. Hanna is arrested and put on trial, arguing that she joined the SS simply for being illiterate. She becomes the object of hostility by the other Nazi co–defendants: she is on "one hand depicted as a Nazi perpetrator, while on the other hand the actual nature of her guilt remains unclear, and in court she becomes the victim of the machinations of her co-defendants" (Niven 182). Hanna is played by Kate Winslet, a talented and well–recognized performer, having received critical acclaim for several works and appeared as the leading actress in several films, and she received the Academy Award of best actress for the role.

Reading Session

Figs. 34 to 36: Hanna and Michael's reading session

The first part of the film narrates trolley conductor Hanna Schmitz and student Michael Berg's love affair. During these scenes, where Hanna is presented as a lovable and desirable mature woman, Michael reads from books to her. The film begins in Neuelstadt, West Germany, 1958, where a rain soaked Michael comes out sick from a street trolley. The non–diegetic music in this scene is calm and slow. He takes cover in the entrance of the building where Hanna lives. She helps him and takes him to her home, where he watches through a stamp collection, some of them with Nazi themes (00:06:28).

The film's photography helps to create the sense of intimacy between the duo: the *mise–en–scène* frames both together often, and very close. They also appear in the nude in several shots, indicating that each reading session is preceeded by a sexual relation. These relations will begin in the narrative when Michael returns with flowers to Hanna's apartment. When he enters the place, the lighting favors the comparison with a whorehouse: it is red and yellow, with heavy tones and shadows, evoking intimacy. By this time Michael watches her undressing before running away, acting as a voyeur, showing his attraction for this mysterious woman.

The affair begins when Michael ends up dirty by getting some coal; when he goes to the shower, Hanna appears nude and rapidly seduces him. The music is very soft and calm, and the sequence's lighting is often dark, in twilight tones, once more indicating intimacy. In general, the photography in these

sequences has many dark shades; excluding both characters, who are lit, the rest of the image is in the dark. Any reading session occurs either in bed or in a bathtub, where the sole source of light comes from a lampshade; the editing, which is slow, alternates between lovemaking and reading. The sequence suggests a state of perfect complicity and harmony between them. Actually, Michael's reading ends up being a condition to be fulfilled before the sexual acts (00:21:10). When he invites her to read as well, she refuses. During a field trip, Hanna and Michael stop by a church where a local choir is performing. Hanna sits over one of the rear benches and cries. This scene may antecipate the trial, where it is revealed that the crime Hanna took part in happened inside a church. Nevertheless, their relation resumes until Hanna is promoted in her job and goes away. Michael finds the apartment empty and his relation with Hanna apparently ends. The next time he sees her will be during her trial (00:50:40), where she is accused of being part of the SS and of having committed a crime related to the Holocaust.

Hanna's Trial

The trial scene happens in the middle of the film. The *mise–en–scène* places the audience in the background, the judges dressed in black garments of West Germany's legal power are in the foreground. The witness stand is in the middle of a very illuminated court of law. In this sequence, Michael will notice Hanna as one of the six accused. The montage cuts fast between all the characters, and with exceptions, the camera will be eye–level.

Hanna and the other defendants are accused of taking part in the murder of three hundred Jewish prisoners during a death march by the end of the war. Survivors come to identify all the defendants, and to denounce the crime: during one night, the prisoners were allowed to sleep inside a church, which was bombed in an English raid and caught fire; the guards locked the prisoners, to prevent an escape; three hundred prisoners died that night. This criminal event is narrated, but never staged to the audience as a visual sequence. One witness states that the accused selected prisoners to work or to go to Auschwitz, and also that Hanna participated in these selections and had favorites

(01:00:20), who were forced to read for her. The camera focuses Hanna's sorrow, with close–ups. The survivors' reports are also filled with emotion: in close–ups, they are shown in a serious mood or crying when remembering the Nazi womens' actions. One of them, Ilana Mather (Alexandra Maria Lara), will reappear later in the film.

Next, the editing enhances the figure of the leading judge, who asks the defendants why they did not open the doors; the women are unwilling to answer. Hanna is shown as being apprehensive. Then comes into the narrative an incriminating SS report about what happened during the fire, which was supposedly signed by the women. A plongée take presents and highlights this document (01:09:27), which is important to the narrative; the defendants remain silent. Then comes the time for Hanna to take the stand, in the middle of the court, placed under the eyes of the judges and the other accused, isolated and alone. This position inside the frame already suggests victimization; until now, the audience knows Hanna exclusively through her affair with Michael. She first tries to justify her actions: they would not open the doors fearing that the prisoners would escape. The montage intercuts her report with a very distressed Michael; through his actions, the viewers are invited to feel sorry for Hanna (01:10:35).

Figs. 37 to 39: Hanna's sorrow while she is put on trial

The judge states calmly that Hanna and the other defendants made a choice: they knew what was happening and prefered to let the prisoners die than risk an escape. Then, the narrative presents Hanna being harassed by the other defendants (01:11:06). Hanna becomes aprehensive; in a very fast sequence

of shots, where the other Nazi women are portrayed in a higher position in relation to Hanna, they all turn against her, shouting and stating that she was in charge, and that to lock the prisoners was her idea. The photography and the editing work together: the defendants shout to Hanna and point their fingers at her, in a series of flashes, highlighting Hanna's emotional state of confusion. Close–up shots of her demonstrate how completely distressed and lost she is. The cuts are also fast, and present the other Nazis solely in their accusations against Hanna. The sequence suggests that Hanna is a victim of the other defendants. By this time the audience already feels some sympathy towards her; she was previously depicted as a beautiful, desirable woman, played by Kate Winslet. The casting choice also works in favor of the character. Her candor also draws sympathy: she confesses the crime spontaneously, while the other defendants are depicted furious and agitated, looking at her in a threatening manner.

Hanna is further distressed, when the judge firmly asks for a sample of her handwriting. Now she faces two choices: to take responsibility for the report or to assume her illiteracy. The camera focuses down from above Hanna's left shoulder, highlighting pen and paper (at the center of the image), reminding how difficult this decision is for her. The paper also reminds her reading moments with Michael, some of them presented in a flashback. At this moment, the film's musical score comes to underline her (and perhaps the viewers') emotions. The montage intercuts between Hanna's distressed face and Michael's sorrow, and their remembrances. Finally, she states coldly to the court that her handwriting is not necessary (01:12:26), and assumes authorship of the report.

Hanna is judged (01:21:04): the court finds that she bore the responsibility for writing and signing the report, placing her as the leader. The other accused are satisfied: Hanna is sentenced to life, but all other women are sentenced only to four years and three months in jail. This sequence also suggests a potential strength of Germany's courts in dealing with legal matters involving Nazis. After the sentences are given, the sequence comes to an end. Throughout the film, Hanna's character manifests itself as a filter for the audience's emotional experience: her motivation and emotion, with which the audience may be able to identify, perhaps could be explained by Kate Winslet's status as a major Hollywood star, talented as well as

charismatic, even when playing a Nazi criminal. Winslet's interpretation of the role is able to give depth and emotion, giving to what could be a stereotyped character the complexity of a real human being, one that is both a perpetrator of the Holocaust, but also capable of suffering.

Attempting Redemption

Figs. 40 and 41: Michael and Ilana

By the end of the film (01:46:09), an older Michael (Ralph Fiennes) searches for the older Ilana Mather (Lena Olin), the author of a memoir about how she survived in a Nazi camp alongside her mother, and who has also testified about Hanna and how she obliged women from the camp to read to her in the evenings. This sequence is set in an elegant apartment, presenting Ilana's financial condition. The lighting is cold, in black and white tones, suggesting formality and coldness. Almost the whole sequence is composed within the continuity editing mode of shot–reverse shot, as the characters talk to each other about Hanna and react in accordance to their words. The camera stays mostly at eye–level. Michael confesses his relationship with Hanna, how she finally learned to read in prison, and tells about how Hanna committed suicide, the note she left and her illiteracy. Ilana is not moved by Hanna's situation: she smiles with discretion, coldly, but gets angry due to Michael's statements about Hanna's illiteracy (01:47:21). For Ilana, it is not enough to justify Hanna's actions. Michael stays in a state of sorrow, almost

crying; each of his remarks is dismissed by Ilana's. Nevertheless, Michael's expression suggests his continuous state of fondness for Hanna. His state of awe regardind Ilana's cold answers demonstrates that still he does not understand fully the reality of Nazism; perhaps, he remains the naive schoolboy.

Then Michael speaks about a tin can with money Hanna left; the camera focuses in a close–up shot Michael getting from his suitcase a tin can, which is left on a table and picked up by Ilana (01:50:16). Her reaction is of surprise: she states that a similar can with sentimental tokens of hers was stolen in the camp. As she demonstrates such emotion, she refuses the money which is inside: for Ilana, Hanna's redemption is unacceptable. She keeps the can to herself and states that nothing can be learned from the camps (01:49:45). Catharsis and knowledge, she remarks, are in literature, only. Another close–up shot of Michael portrays his discrete smile: he suggests that the money could be donated to an organization that combats adult illiteracy, perhaps a Jewish one. As Ilana puts it, there are Jewish organizations for everything, and illiteracy was never a Jewish problem. This statement is important to the narrative: Jewish people are completely able to "read", especially the Nazis' atrocities. Michael's feelings towards Hanna may indicate that this kind of reading, this understanding of Nazism and its consequences, is still difficult to Germans in general. Finally, the camera focuses Ilana once more, as she coldly states that what the Nazis did was well beyond any kind of forgiveness.

The sequence is notable because it gives the opportunity for a victim to speak about a Nazi criminal, but also because it may function as an attempt for Hanna to be remembered as a human rather than a monster: by giving the money in the tin can she tries to achieve forgiveness (which is impossible) and seek out redemption for what she had done. A sad diegetic piano music, underscoring Michael's melancholy, ends the sequence (01:52:34).

The character played by Winslet in *The Reader* closely resembles historical Nazi Ilse Koch, the wife of the SS officer who commanded Buchenwald and Majdanek camps. After the war she was tried for such crimes as private enrichment, embezzlement, and the murder of prisoners to prevent them from giving testimony. She was also tried for "participating in a criminal plan for aiding, abetting and participating in the murders

at Buchenwald" (Zenter 43). The similarities between the characters may have been more than coincidence: "Professor Bill Niven at Nottingham Trent University, an authority on Schlink and on his book, believes the parallels between Schmitz and Koch are unmistakable. No other known female camp guard comes close to matching up with Schmitz10", he said. The statement acknowledges a series of coincidences between the character represented in the film and the real–life Nazi criminal:

> the day before her release from prison Schmitz commits suicide. Koch also killed herself while serving a life sentence. She had recently been reunited with her illegitimate son, Uwe, who had only just discovered her true identity and guilt. Niven, an expert on contemporary German history and literature, said: "We are told that Ilse's son wrote poems to her in prison and that Michael and Hanna were united by reading. What also struck me was that Ilse was accused of using a riding crop to strike prisoners and Hanna, in the book, strikes Michael with a belt.[11]

One problem with this representation of Hanna is its complete relativization of the Holocaust. The main character is presented as a victim of illiteracy; the other co–defendants at the court use her distress in order to blame her for everything, looking for lighter sentences for themselves. Likewise, her portrayal as a seductive and beautiful woman invites the audience to identify with her. She was nevertheless a Holocaust perpetrator, in an ambiguous and ambivalent depiction that transforms, or perhaps alternates, criminal perpetrators likeable characters. On one hand there could exist the "idea of a perpetrator–victim 'grey zone', yet on the other, in focusing on

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[10] The interview is available at http://www.theguardian.com/film/2009/jan/18/winslet-reader. Accessed in 05.10.2014.

[11] Available at http://www.theguardian.com/film/2009/jan/18/winslet-reader. Accessed in 05.10.2014.

Hanna's illiteracy, the script offers a monocausal explanation for her conduct that would seem to work against any commitment towards exploring ethical complexities" (Niven 182). Furthermore, it can be argued that Hanna's status as a perpetrator remains incomplete, because the film's narrative never presents her crime to the audience: "the slaughtered Jews of Europe are not swept under the rug or trivialized, but their long, large, and complex story is thus barely referenced" (Beck 209). Hanna is nevertheless humanized, represented as an attempt to depict a character that escapes from stereotyped versions of Nazis previously portrayed by Hollywood. This may also lead to criticism. By "emphasizing the inclusive humanity of Holocaust agents such as Hanna, Schlink's Nazi protagonist, there is a classic argument in bad faith that results in an understandable but glib position." (Worthington 204). The author remarks how the film reasons with the character's actions: "well, any of us could have been the perpetrators... given this or that circumstance.... Such reasoning invites us to understand (and so excuse) Hanna as a victim of circumstance rather than an agent of horror" (Worthington 204).

What the audience knows about the crime is given through the perhaps sympathetic mediation of the main male character, without any images of Nazi crimes. The crime is never represented, leaving the audience to imagine the possibility of it. Júlio Bezerra asks: "why have we no access to any of these images? We do not see Hanna in concentration camps, because Berg also does not know these images. He is our mediator inside the narrative. He only conducts it, this being exactly the problem" (17). The author states that "*The Reader* uses Berg as a pawn of its narrative machinery, but remains distant from the conflicts that torment its main character" (Bezerra 16, my translation).[12]

Would Hanna's illiteracy be enough to allow her to go free? Perhaps in the film it is possible to see the "desire to make Hanna innocent to the eyes of the spectator. After all, what we

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[12] "por que não temos acesso a nenhuma dessas imagens? Não vemos Hanna em campos de concentração, porque Berg também desconhece essas imagens. Ele é o nosso mediador dentro da narrativa. Ele a conduz, apenas; sendo este justamente o problema. *O Leitor* se utiliza de Berg como uma peça de sua engenharia narrativa, mas permanece distante dos conflitos que atormentam seu personagem principal" (Bezerra 16).

see is the nudity of Kate Winslet and the passion of the character for literature. We are spared of seeing her wearing a swastika" (16, my translation).[13] The film appears to treat a very complex historical portrayal in a relativized manner: the Holocaust scenes appear later in the film, not as a major or collective problem, but as a detail in the lives of the protagonists that complicates their relation and perhaps had better remain buried in the past. Thus, the Holocaust does not constitute an immediate problem, which is definitely a major problem and source of criticism on the film.

Portrayed in some of the film's scenes, Hanna's character may be presented as a seductress, playing and tricking the young and naive German boy. Hanna may represent Nazism undercover criminality under the guise of seduction, meanwhile Michael is Germany's unsuspected people: "by sexualizing the generational divide, Schlink demonstrates the seductiveness of power (power is sexy) and encourages the reader to ask about the price the seduced pays for his seduction" (Mahlendorf 459). By creating a representation of seduction and sexuality that leads to crime, the film can be read as an account of Germany's struggle to understand and cope with a traumatic past. It can also reveal the acknowledged dimension of the Nazi trauma, a political force so strong and so pervasive that even an illiterate person would find a place, if willing to be part of it.

The film may be criticized for a series of issues. The gender of the perpetrator is one of them. The presentation of a seductress appears to be adequate, in order to induce into the viewers the feeling of being overpowered by a soft and sensualized image of crime. The idea of an illiterate criminal is also important, perhaps advancing the notion of someone less guilty, more dependent on the reader's comprehension of such limitation, as if the fact would somehow excuse or explain away the crime: "why use a woman as the perpetrator when the overwhelming number of guards and SS were men? Why choose an illiterate lower class ethnic German when the SS was populated by middle-class, high school graduates? Were not nine

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[13] "desejo de inocentar Hanna aos olhos do espectador. Afinal, o que vemos é a nudez de Kate Winslet e a paixão da personagem por literatura. Somos poupados de vê-la vestindo uma suástica." (Bezerra 16).

of the fifteen attendees of the Wannsee Conference holders of doctorates?" (Mahlendorf 459). Such thought may be complemented by the fact that "illiteracy certainly wasn't the problem of the Nazis" (459–460).

As proposed by Ursula Mahlendorf, the chosing to represent Hanna in a sexual relation with Michael may stand as a key component to understand the intimate relation Germans had with Nazism political power. A major value to the novel (and to the film as well), lies "in Schlink's attempt to show that the intimate contact with perpetrators, collaborators and bystanders was unavoidable for the entire post–WWII generation" (460). Both the book and the film appear as a symptom of Germans' needs to look to the past and to confront the participation of their parents' generation with the Holocaust and their crimes. There is an apparent moral gap between the old and the new Germany, as if the new generation would have a desperate need to address and to comprehend their parents' generation, that of the perpetrators: "the vacuum created by the desertion and silence of the parents is immediately filled by Michael's erotic adventure with his lover. The thirty–six year old Hanna Schmitz makes an impression on him not only because he is pubertal but also because Michael, as one of four children, has been deprived of mothering and physical comfort" (Mahlendorf 464). Michael's adventure with Hanna comes to a traumatic recognition only after it is too late: "it is only at the trial that the reader finds out that Hanna had a similar, sinister penchant for the 'young ones who [were] weak and delicate' and who 'all ended up on the transports' (466). Up to this point he finally realizes how he was played and tricked all along. To Hanna "he is a means for sex and reading entertainment, both of which she keeps under tight and total control" (466). The film may represent the gap between the old and the new generation, which are linked together, forcing Germans to look to their ancestors' actions: "Michael's anger at the Nazi crimes of his parents' generation, which he shares with his 1968 student contemporaries and which would distance him from the woman's crimes, evaporates with the realization of his profoundly personal tie to this mass murderer" (Mahlendorf 467).

The phantom of the war and the Holocaust reverberate through Germany's post–war policies of compensation when facing the Nazi crimes. Hanna commits suicide while in prison and once more tries to gain the upper hand over Michael: "even

beyond death, Hanna is her own law and attempts to remain in control by designating Michael Berg as her messenger to the survivor. He is to bring her Hanna's life savings, including even the coins kept in a tea tin, all accounting accurate to the last penny!" (471). Hanna's solution somehow echoes Germany's indemnizations of the post–war era: one of Hanna's victims "is to designate for what purpose the money should be used. The survivor immediately understands and names what Hanna implied: demand of absolution from crimes against humanity for monetary compensation" (471–472). The issue of illiteracy appears to be not only that of Hanna's, but of the German people in general to understand the Holocaust and other Nazi crimes: "both Hanna and Michael persist in their emotional denial and their refusal to understand the causes of the Holocaust. This is their emotional illiteracy" (472).

The survivors' and victims' status towards Germans is also problematic, as both in the novel and in the film they are nearly absent. The atrocity committed by Hanna and the other SS women is never presented. The victims remain faceless, and the crime invisible to the audience. Hanna and Michael do not see "the victims as specific and unique members of humanity. Neither ever empathizes with or even understands that empathy for the personal sufferings of the victims can be felt. Neither senses that grief and contrition over the victims' tragic deaths must be expressed to be felt" (Mahlendorf 472). The issue reflects the Germans' difficulties to understand and make amends with their parents' past, but this may come to more problems in the future. Ascension of right–wing parties and a revival of Nazism are among of the most dangerous: "all through the 1950s to the 1990s the charge was leveled against the German school system that it failed to instruct students about the Holocaust and left the next generations of Germans unprotected against a resurgence of Nazism" (472). In the context of the 1990s, especially after the fall of the Berlin Wall and Germany's political reunification, political parties such as the openly right–wing Freedom Party became a problem. There is also the issue of victimization of Germans during the war: "neither the criminality of the perpetrator generation nor the enabling silence of the bystanders ended with Germany's defeat in 1945. Hidden expressions of anger, shame, and resentment in everyday encounters and defensive silences are overlooked as much as the author's point

that just these seemingly trite events shape the next generation" (476). Germans may use the crimes committed by vengeful Soviet soldiers by the end of the war as well as Allied bombing runs over German cities to explain away at least to some level the memories of Germany's own crimes, as historians such as Nolte have tried to argue.

This status of victim that the novel appears to indulge has come under scrutiny by other critics and became an issue: the novel "has been widely criticized for marshalling a 'misplaced' or 'incorrect' empathy for the perpetrator" (Miller 45). The representation of the Holocaust is one of the main problems: "Schlink's focus on Germany's struggle to come to terms with the Holocaust is seen to marginalize the Holocaust as an event. In addition, although it was initially praised for its exploration of guilt among second–generation Germans, the novel has increasingly drawn criticism for portraying both Michael and Hanna as victims" (53). This issue also returns in the film. Hanna's intimate days with Michael are full of pleasure. After the audience has witnessed this experience, the court scene may strongly invite spectators to identify with the couple: "Schlink's novel mobilizes identification with both victims *and* perpetrators so that throughout the novel we are asked to acknowledge that empathy can accommodate guilt as well as innocence and that our identifications are not always politically desirable" (54). Through Hanna's seduction, "*The Reader* suggests that fantasy mediates an individual's relationship to the past in the same way that it mediates an individual's relationship to a lover. That is to say, it is not that Michael is forced to come to terms with Germany's history through his relationship with Hanna, but that the past and Hanna are both presented as objects of desire, both subject to fantasy" (Miller 54). There could be a desire to see Germany's past in another light, perhaps a more relative and positive one, the dream of another possible Germany. Instead of being a historical account of the Holocaust, both novel and film present themselves as a new representation of a generation desire to understand the trauma.

The Reader along with other recent films, some from Germany, others from the United States, portray the Nazi era through the eyes of the Germans, being them innocent civilians or Nazi perpetrators. Among the first group of films here analyzed is *Sophie Scholl: Die Letzte Tage* (2004), about victim and resister

Sophie Scholl. *The Book Thief* (2013), also about a young girl who suffers during bombings in Berlin, is another example. But there are also films that have tried to create new portrayals of Nazi criminals or of Nazism. Back in the 1970s, *The Thin Drum* (1979) depicted a possible metaphor of a Germany that was unwilling to grow up; *Downfall* (2004) presents an account of a very disturbed, weakened, but somehow humane Adolf Hitler, meanwhile highlighting the suffering of German civilians through the lens of Hitler's sympathetic female secretary. And both *The White Ribbon* (2009) and *The Wave* (2008) present more symbolically representations of an overall authoritarian and violent German society, a pre–Nazi Germany.

Postmodernism is characterized by fragmentation, emphasis on relativity, and cynicism over History claims, despite the fact that the Holocaust is a subject not open to doubt; the danger about casting doubts over it could even invite Neo–Nazi revisionism. As such, *The Reader* "has profound implications for the task of writing about the Holocaust (with its compelling need for veracity), for postmodern narration and thought (with their rejection of 'absolute' access to truth and awareness of their own mediation), and for the problematic ways in which these constellations come together in Schlink's text" (Metz 301). When postmodernism and the Holocaust come together the book (and the film) is what is left. Thus, Schlink's work "emerges as a 'trauma' or 'crisis' text: one that remains suspended between, on the one hand, the uncanny repetition of gender(ed) paradigms suspiciously similar to those employed by fascism and, on the other, a postmodern self–deconstruction of this very repetition; one, however, that does not resolve the text's fundamental agony, ambiguity, and traumatic structure of desire" (301). Following the novel, the film presents also the idea of Hanna's illiteracy working in the same way as Michael's inability to understand her participation as a Holocaust perpetrator. Michael's difficulty comes to illustrate the Germans' unwillingness to cope with the Nazi generation's deeds. This could be the novel's (and the film's) most conspicuous and controversial metaphoric gesture. Apparently, its use of Hanna's illiteracy "might be read as a cultural metaphor apologetically alluding to Germans who presumably were not 'in the know' about what was happening to Jews under the Nazis" (303).

But Michael likewise becomes the unsuspected victim of Nazi seduction. His actions stand for Germany's and its people, seduced by a political form that in both novel and film takes the shape of a very attractive and older, experienced woman: "this allegorical casting of Germany's submission to fascism as a seduction is by itself already deeply problematic. It smacks of blames hifting and continues the novel's apparently apologetic trend by figuring Germany as an innocent victim or, in Michael's case, abused child" (305). Through Michael, Germany is somehow absolved from Nazi crimes, as if the Germans were children whose difficulties to understand Nazi crimes could be excused and flushed away. This excuse's agent is a woman, also an agent of seduction. Female concentration camp guards did exist indeed, but they were however "statistically insignificant" (Koonz 404) in the much larger power structure of Nazi Germany and in no way altered the overwhelmingly patriarchal bigotry and contempt for women which Nazism clearly proclaimed and institutionalized. Hanna's characterization clearly depicts a somehow "mythological" seductress. All the basic characteristics are there: "Hanna is marked with the traits (stereo)typically coded 'female' in patriarchal discourse of deceptiveness, manipulativeness, and falseness: she structures her entire life around lies (literacy, the concealing of her Nazi past) and invents cover arguments to deflect from the truth" (Metz 306). The use of a female agent also underlines gender issues, since "the dangers of fascism and the subversion of truth are figured as a woman or as feminine–coded force" (308). Throughout her trial and sentencing one could see "the elimination of the threats she represents and the logical conclusion of the push to relegate the feminine to a more harmless position" (309). Nevertheless, Hanna is dangerously seductive even there, once more marking the difficulty to read one's traumatic past. No one can see what really happened, and Hanna uses her illiteracy to subvert truth.

Moreover, Hanna's trial soon becomes a simulacra of justice. Her conviction is due to her unwilingness to present a copy of her signature, which would reveal her inability to read and write, making, as suggested by Metz, "equally subversive [...] the crucial lie around which the trial comes to revolve: Hanna's insistence that she had written the incriminating report, something that she could not have done due to her illiteracy" (307). She prefers to compromise herself as the main agent of the

crime, "confessing" that she wrote the report about the fire and the prisoner's deaths, making her the guiltier one. On an individual level, her "fallacious claim results in a heavier sentence for her and in lighter ones for her co–defendants, and is thus not personally to her advantage, it undermines on a broader level what might be called the court's 'master narrative' – the functioning of the very principles of truth, fairness, and appropriateness of punishment upon which the concept of justice rests" (307). The courtroom scene may also serve to represent how Germans were willing and able to prosecute and to punish Nazi actions. If that is so, it is important to take a brief look upon post–war trials in Germany.

Several where held in a few German cities; what is disappointing is how lenient the courts were with former Nazis. Meanwhile the Allies, especially the Russians and Poles, were severe with Nazi criminals, sentencing many of them to death or life imprisonment, the German courts handed out only a very small amount of life sentences to some of Auschwitz and Treblinka Nazis. In the Sobibor trial, held in Hagen in 1965, only Karl Frenzel was sentenced to life imprisonment, despite being released sixteen years later (gas chamber operator Erich Bauer was sentenced to life in a separated trial in Berlin, in 1950). The other convicted Nazis received sentences from eight years of imprisonment to full acquittal. This "larger" eight year sentence was given to one Franz Wolf, who was convicted of participating in the mass murder of 115,000 Jews! The German Nazi trials were lighter than Hanna's was. But even during her trial, Hanna may still control the scenario: "beneath the surface of the trial at which she herself is judged, we find the spectacle of Hanna, the female Holocaust perpetrator–clad, moreover, on sentencing day in a theatrical simulacrum of an SS uniform simultaneously disordering and ordering the proceedings, surreptitiously directing how post–Holocaust justice is meted out" (308).

The Reader may stand as a film that tries to present some ways to understand the fascist trauma, and emerges as a postmodern discourse that sets Germany's traumatic memories with the Holocaust remembrance and sanctification. It disrupts previous claims about the Holocaust, that may have been challenged only by Neo–Nazi allegations. Thus, it touches some very sensitive issues regarding the representation of a Holocaust crime. This could be one of the greatest

intersections with the sphere of postmodern concerns – this time, concerns directly related to the problem of the Holocaust – Hanna's trial, with its failure to pin down the truth, becomes an extended figure for one of the novel's most important underlying questions: the question of how a text can approach the Holocaust in a postmodern age; of how at a time in which the existence and accessibility of truth have been called into question or redefined as functions of textual mediation itself, a text can approach the one event whose demands on truth are the most compelling. (314)

In *The Reader* apparently even an undisputed historical event such as the Holocaust becomes a target for irony, contradiction, doubt, perceived rather more as a possibility than as historical fact: "this postmodern problem of truth has other implications for a discussion of the Holocaust as well: ones that illuminate contradictory signifying possibilities opened up by Schlink's rhetorical field" (314). The novel and the film may induce a dangerous idea regarding the Holocaust and its responsibility, to the end that could serve to indulge fascist or totalitarian claims, based upon a supposed "absolute relativity". One major criticism would be that "postmodernism's embrace of fluid signification and rejection of absolutes have frequently been read as a radical, relativistic assault on the facts, truth claims, and veracity of history (and thus as an accessory to fascism itself)" (314). Despite the fact that postmodern theory helps to counter the Western notion of a supreme, ontological or absolute totalitarianism, sending away any concept of one major or single truth or narrative, it may also be used to wash away any idea of otherness and plurality, by denying the historical claims about everything it addresses, making normal and acceptable even the "the exclusion of Otherness and plurality that, taken to an extreme, helped make the Holocaust possible" (314).

But by being a postmodern representation, the novel itself may have the power to use rhetorics to point out the very

slipperiness of texts and representations, where "they become a powerful force for destabilizing, from within, the novel's own dangerous self–presentation as a transparent, unproblematically trustworthy discourse of truth. (315)" It has been stated that "the reduction of the feminine' to a mere figure for deconstructive differance" (Jardine 18) presents itself as mysogenic, bringing back old patriarchal claims of perverse seduction directed against female characters. The problem may be that "the specific female character positioned by the logic of the text as the focal point for this differance and anti–totalitarian resistance is in fact a Nazi – once again a perverse irony and highly disturbing convergence, to say the least" (Metz 316). The author states that "in the thematic context of Schlink's novel, the entire discussion of falseness necessarily evokes the other idea of the debate surrounding postmodernism and the Holocaust; the side that views postmodernism's rejection of absolute truth as an accomplice to fascism itself" (Metz 316).

Thus, the portrayal of Hanna remains a very problematic issue both to the novel and to the film. Both can be used as fascist tools, once it is realized the fact that if postmodernism is based upon the denial of History's truth claims, the Holocaust itself could be denied as a historical subject and happening. In a more extreme way, the Holocaust becomes relative in itself, even its historicity: "in celebrating the rejection of absolutes, however well–intentioned in the specific case of Michael's controlling narrative, we raise the specter of the absence of truth altogether, including the truth of the Holocaust" (Metz 316). At the same time it presents a very problematic and dangerous way to understand the Holocaust phenomenon through a more softened and relative frame. With Winslet's talented performance, the film presents a domestication of the Holocaust violence reducing it to a familiar issue. Interacting with a major perpetrator in the most intimate manner possible, Michael brings violence home, the experience of the Holocaust becoming at the same time part of Michael's experience and his own process of victimization. Michael thus stands for Germany's people, likewise victimized by Nazism seduction, the victim's status justifying his ignorance and casting his and Germany's responsibility over the crime. The narrative "both brings the Holocaust closer and, through the illusion of accessibility or familiarity itself, becomes a defense mechanism against the Shoah's monstrous reality and alterity"

(317). At the same time, the Holocaust is reduced to the perpetrator's people narrative of absolution and victimization, domesticated through a burgeois familiar story of seduction: "this process of domestication is at work in *Der Vorleser*'s own rendition of the Holocaust, in which unprecedented historical trauma is transcribed into the media language of family–trauma–of–the–week (incest, seduction, child abuse) a displacement of registers ideally suited to the 1990s pop culture from which the novel emerged and, in the realm of talk show host Oprah, found its American home" (317).

Like *Schindler* and *Valkyrie*, *The Reader* sets itself among other post–Holocaust texts that may respond to the demands of Holocaust representation, considering that a postmodern moment needs to respond "to the economic and political conditions of its emergence and public circulation" (317). The film uses a very talented, beautiful and popular actress, which appears to invite identification with the perpetrator. Her portrayal may have been convincing enough, earning her an Academy Award. But several issues in the film derived from the novel continue to question the validity of such Holocaust representation.

By presenting the case of Hanna Schmitz from the perspective of her young lover, "Bernhard Schlink's award–winning *Der Vorleser* would seem to represent that cutting edge of Holocaust literature interested in depicting perpetrators in a more nuanced fashion" (Donahue 60), the same happening with the main characters in *Schindler's List* and *Valkyrie*. This is something that may stand for a gesture aimed towards more complex ways in portaying both the Holocaust and Nazi agents. The likeable narrator's attempt to come to terms with the Holocaust, which is espoused as exemplary, proves in the end to rely on a problematic conception of dual victimization: of Hanna as victim of circumstance, and of himself as victim of Hanna" (Donahue 60). The representation of a Nazi character in *The Reader* appears to stand in a similar context shared both by *Schindler* and *Valkyrie*. All films may be part of a less moralizing and stereotyped rendition of Nazi Germany's historical past. Donahue states that "this more nuanced depiction of a perpetrator has been hailed as an advance over the simplistic, moralising approaches of the past, which tend to cast perpetrators and victims in monochromatic extremes" (61). The author says that "critics have applauded the novel's repudiation of the second

generation's blanket condemnation of their fathers' complicity in Nazi crimes, voiced most memorably when this now-greying generation were boisterous students of the late 1960s and early 1970s (61)". Finally, he argues that "on each of these counts, Schlink has been credited with providing a subtler, richer fictional account that represents a moral achievement in its own right" (61).

Nevertheless, even if a less stereotypical account of Nazism and the Holocaust is important and necessary, criticism acknowledges "that Schlink's allegedly more nuanced exploration of a Nazi criminal is in fact a kind of mystification, which, at any rate, comes at the expense of a palpable and precise sense of criminal responsibility" (62). The portrayal of Hanna may account for such mystification. She appears wrapped in Winslet's beauty, seduction and nudity, and evokes Winslet's previous film record as a major superstar. Her characterization strongly endorses the view of the female as agent of seductive and dangerous powers. The issue of revisionism upon the Holocaust may appear when confronting the way in which the perpetrator is reconstructed through the narrative: "ultimately, *Der Vorleser* represents not a probing advance, but a self–congratulatory exercise for present–day 'readers' of the Holocaust. A revisionist assessment such as this must of course come to terms with the overwhelmingly positive reception this novel has thus far elicited" (62). Both novel and film could be used to understand Germans' needs to excuse themselves of the past, remembering it not as part of the perpetrators' universe but also as seduced victims who have no responsibility for the tragedy. This could make Hanna a more likeable figure: "to second–generation German readers eager to understand (and, perhaps, justify) their own attachment to the generation of perpetrators and bystanders, this underprivileged figure seems to have provided a seductively simple answer both to the question of how they could have loved a morally compromised parent, and how a basically good person might end up as an SS guard" (63).

Another of the film's problem is the linkage between illiteracy and brutality. Several high–ranking Nazis held doctorates, and illiteracy may not be a particular characteristic that would explain Nazis' acts of violence. Nazis' actions, formal knowledge and illiteracy are separate issues that cannot be used to explain one another: "in linking illiteracy and brutality, Schlink

is introducing explanatory ideas about the Holocaust that have been deeply discredited precisely by that event" (63). Instead of being someone who deserves credit or sympathy because of a lesser formal condition, something that would excuse her actions, "Hanna in fact embodies the liberal credo on criminality, a fact that may explain some of this book's appeal in countries far from Germany. While she evokes the horrors of the Holocaust, she simultaneously makes the Holocaust appear more amenable to familiar models of human behaviour" (65).

The possibility of offering a more understandable and complex way into which one could confront the past with a different view has been challenged as well. Instead it has been stated that Schlink "is merely replaying unanswerable debates about criminality at a fairly abstract level. Indeed, most of what Berg offers in the way of 'philosophical' reflection is in fact either a restatement of some moral commonplace, or a self–deprecatory assertion, which, though apparently endearing to a good many readers, often does more to cloud than clarify the discussion" (65). Hanna's actions may be subtle sometimes, in order to invoke sympathy or identification: during her trial, "at that point when our narrator *appears* to attain the greatest distance from Hanna, he is – as our fictional autobiographer – in fact mightily at work at increasing our sympathy for her" (66). The same can be said about her apparent self–righteousness, by leaving "her life's savings to the now sole survivor of the horrible church fire" (66). A main problem in the text is the way in which the perpetrators are presented. Hanna joined the SS not out of racism or prejudice against Jewish people, or by believing in Nazism as a political force, but by the simple fact that she was illiterate and simple minded. Thus, "the narrative logic of this book excludes the notorious Nazi perpetrators in its focus on the more common and presumably less enthusiastic collaborators" (67).

The trial scene was also criticized. In the film, this is reduced to Hanna's interrogation, where she is constantly in a state of panic and suffering, confronted by co–defendants that play out her fears, and by the shame of having to admit in public her lack of formal education. Instead of being convicted by the certainty of a major Nazi crime that is never represented or brought upon in any form of dramatization, making it enough to stand for her guilt, she prefers to admit her role. She denies

herself a chance for acquittal or at least a lighter sentencing, preferring not to recognize her inability to read and write. Since her crime is never presented, her responsibility and guilt are never properly proven to the audience:

> For a courtroom drama centring on Holocaust crimes, we encounter an astounding lacuna. Schlink has made this possible – and apparently plausible – by a number of ruses: an inept judge, an inexperienced defence attorney, Hanna's illiteracy, and a kind of reverse *deus ex machina* in the form of the hand–written report of the church fire that incriminates Hanna by pure chance and in a manner the other co–defendants could not fully have expected. (67)

To counter the book and the representation perhaps, Donahue offered a portrayal about the personality of real perpetrators, those judged in Frankfurt in 1965 for their actions at Auschwitz Death Camp. They "hardly appeared to be reduced to a state of '*Stumpfheit*', as if '*betaubt oder betrunken*'. In fact, they were often quite spirited, self–righteous, argumentative, and arrogant. On a few occasions they smiled and even laughed in the face of their accusers" (69). In the same year another trial was held in Germany, where surviving Sobibor Nazis where tried by the actions that Jack Gold's film tries to reconstruct and present. The main defendant was Karl Frenzel, one of the major Nazi characters in the 1987 film. If in this older film Nazis such Frenzel are presented as cold–blooded killers, "clearly, *Der Vorleser* is more concerned to establish Hanna as victim than as perpetrator" (72). In *Sobibor*, Nazis's actions are well clear, and Frenzel and other Nazis can be seen acting towards the prisoners with the uttermost violence, cruelty and brutality. Establishing Hanna's guilty is much more difficult: the film does not present her doing such to her prisoners, and she never appears wearing a SS uniform or an outfit that identifies her as a Nazi. Donahue says that "in the end, Hanna's wartime guilt is not absolute or specific, but relational and vague; defined not positively, but in the negative" (72). The character of Hanna "has metamorphosed into a bystander, or at worst, a fellow–traveller" (73). She

becomes less a Nazi and much more a "normal" being caught in the web of chance. Audiences with no previous comprehension of the Holocaust may have a particular problematic experience with the subject, by perceiving an agent of the event as a victim: "readers with no firsthand experience of the camps, and these of course constitute the bulk of the novel's current and future readership, remain entitled, even invited, to see Hanna not as an agent of evil but principally as a victim of circumstance" (76).

Casting severe doubt upon this Holocaust narration, the novel and the film may stand as a postmodern accomplishment. Everything appears blurred, the perpetrator itself may be a victim, the crime is presented as a mere possibility rather than something that could be taken as granted. At the same time Hanna is both perpetrator and victim, and "the fact that the novel might be taken in opposite directions, 'damning' Hanna outright on the one hand, and simply deeming her an unheroic bystander on the other, constitutes what is perhaps the book's crowning postmodern victory" (76). Thus, the main postmodern trace would be perhaps this impossible, unsolvable ambiguity regarding culpability, that nevertheless carries within itself a severe ethical burden: "on the one hand, one senses in these pronouncements a postmodern valorisation of ambiguity *per se*, which if taken to its logical extreme would of course undermine ethics entirely" (77).

There is no actual problem regarding Hanna and her status as a criminal. Even the novel makes clear the fact that she was a Nazi agent and somehow was present with other female guards during the event that killed three hundred female Jewish prisoners: "while there is surely a good deal of enduring mystery regarding the degree to which Hanna was nudged into her role by her underprivileged upbringing (the irresolvable mix of social determination and free will), there is no essential or higher moral truth in failing to connect crime with criminal" (Donahue 78). The ambiguity in the text has not a suspenseful function, considering the impossibility of Hanna's total innocence: "in the case of *Der Vorleser*, the critical valorization of ambiguity serves to enforce a simplistic binary division of perpetrators into the notorious evildoers and a vast and undifferentiated category of what historian Richard Levy refers to as the 'middle management', a group problematically 'represented' by Hanna and her sisters" (79). Those evildoers Donahue refers to could be exemplified by *Sobibor*'s Nazis such as Frenzel and Wagner,

death camps agents who take personal gratification upon tormenting and killing Jewish victims. Hanna is also a victim of chance, a "normal" everyday person confronted with overwhelming decisions during war time, standing for what might have been most of Germany's people, not presenting a more particular sickening trace of Anti–Semitism or bigotry. Stauffenberg's depiction in Cruise's film would somehow stand for the same: most of the German Military machine, aside from the SS, fought for Germany's sake and not Hitler's. But it has been argued that "this is not a deeper truth, but a cultural defence against such recent historical discoveries as on display in the recent 'Wehrmacht' exhibit – which, according to Judith Friedlander, painfully challenges 'the assumption, widely held in Germany, that in contrast to the SS and the Gestapo, the regular German army did not commit acts of atrocities against civilians during World War II'" (79–80). This is the more problematic once we realize that despite participating in several crimes, including the Holocaust, the German Army endured and continued as an institution, while the SS was effaced and terminated completely. *Valkyrie*'s representation of the German Army, an institution that exists until this day as a supposed simple professional apolitical corporation may help to understand the insistence to isolate the SS and the Gestapo as the sole agents of the Holocaust.

Furthermore, there is the issue of Germany's potential victimization as potentially represented in Michael's character. He could be understood as representing a whole innocent Germany, unaware that the lover next to him belongs to the Nazi regime. Michael then represents the gullible German people, while Hanna is the evil and manipulative seductress that represents the perpetrators of Nazi crimes. By falling into Hanna's scheme and manipulation, Michael "sleeps" with evil and crime, nevertheless unaware until much later on. This relation could be used to separate Germany and Nazism, as if they were very different worlds, that had never really mixed. Nevertheless the film and the novel propose a new way to understand Germany's culpability and the perpetrator's actions. The character of Hanna defies the old stereotyped notion once bestowed upon German characters by Hollywood: she is not exactly altogether evil; instead, she is manipulative, seductive, and we are never able to witness her crimes. The film also depicts

a trial in Germany, presenting the idea that German courts were swift and hard to punish Nazi crimes, foreshadowing the notion that justice prevailed in the end.

What may emerge from representations in *Schindler's List*, *Valkyrie* and *The Reader* is a new perspective to represent and to understand the Holocaust, where "we might begin to write a history of the war's end in which some Germans were victims, some Germans were perpetrators, and some Germans were both" (Moeller 182), and at the same time, "find some redemptive way back to the spiritual Heimat of the Germans" (Kaes 221).

Hanna ends by being perhaps the most problematic character in all the films studied in this research. She is a fictional Nazi character, deeply involved as a perpetrator in the Holocaust. Her character also displays many similarities to real life Nazi women. Despite the fact that the part played by women in the atrocities adds to the horror of the regime, the role of German women in the Holocaust was somehow overshadowed by that of men, usually regarded as the real perpetrators of atrocities against Jewish and other people deemed as undesirable by the Nazis. Although with lesser autonomy and answering to men in commanding positions, women were also employed as overseers in all major Nazi death camps. Hanna's complete character is never fully understandable throughout the film, since we notice only her seductive, womanly, feminine and somehow fragile side: in the first part of the film she is pure desire and seduction towards a younger and less experienced man, characteristics that are easily portrayed by Winslet's talent. Hanna's full responsibility is somehow uncertain: the other defendants blame everything on her, to which she strongly objects. Her assumption of guilt is also manipulative: she prefers to face a life sentence instead of recognizing her inability to read and write. This lack of basic abilities such as reading and writing also make it hard to believe that the SS would hire her in the first place: the Death Camp world would involve a daily routine of roll calls, prisoners' lists and so on; this lack of formal knowledge could be another way to bring some sympathy towards Hanna, and somehow diminish the responsibility for her crime. But forcing prisoners to read to her, instead of killing and torturing them, would be enough to indicate her power of life and death over such prisoners.

Nazi female overseers, despite having less power than their male counterparts, were also brutal and very dangerous. It is important to remember that fictional Hanna has been compared with real life character Ilse Koch, who acted in Buchenwald camp, where about 50,000 people were killed (reference). Koch was known to prisoners for personally selecting people to be beaten and killed, and subjected to all kinds of horrors: "the prisoners' severed heads were publically displayed under her orders. Koch crossed the camp on her horse and would choose prisoners who had displeased her to be beaten by SS guards" (Felton 95–96). Ilse's infamy inspired a number of exploitation films, the most famous being *Ilse the She-Wolf of the SS* (1975), and she was convicted of killing tatooed prisoners to use their skins as lampshades and book covers, and other parts of their bodies to use them as grisly souvenirs or trophies. Both characters were also captured and sentenced to life, and both committed suicide while serving their sentences.

Hanna shares some characteristics with Auschwitz female SS officer Irma Grese as well. That is something that may have to do with both characters' acknowledged beauty, and likewise, with female seduction. Auschwitz survivors nicknamed Grese "the beautiful beast". Her looks were matched by her sadism and cruelty. Like Hanna, she would pick female prisoners as "pets", getting rid of them after a while and replacing them with new ones. It has been argued that *The Reader* allowed the SS women to earn some fame (Felton 93) and be recognized as a part of the Nazi aggression, though the vast majority of the work in the Nazi Death Camp was performed by SS men. But "unlike the sympathetic SS guard Hannah Schmitz, portrayed in Schlink's novel, the female concentration camps' guards were among the most despicable human beings who have ever lived" (93).

Nevertheless, it is important to acknowledge that Hanna cannot be understood as a simple Nazi stereotyped character. Although she may look seductive and innocent in the first half of the film, she is also charismatic, perhaps due to Winslet's fame as a major Hollywood film star, and able to communicate suffering and victimization, the last given the court's and the co–defendants' treatment of her during the trial scene, the latter of whom are able to escape with much lighter prison sentences.

Thus, Hanna escapes the stereotyping model used in most films about Nazi Germany and the Holocaust. She is not portrayed as cruel as Gustav Wagner, or treacherous as *Private Ryan*'s "Steamboat Willie". The new portrayal of the Nazi character when compared with previous films about the Holocaust strongly signals the importance of postmodern theory to understand the subject and demands a better and more complex look in order to understand the possibilities given by new narratives about the Nazi phenomenon.

Comparing the first to the second group of films about the Nazis and the Holocaust here analyzed, some remarkable differences can be found. In the first group, Nazis are portrayed and well defined by one major characteristic, which is evil. They are cruel to people, killing and tormenting them, and are always understood as the antagonists in the films' narratives. Characters such as the Nazi Doctor, sergeant Gustav Wagner, and "Steamboat Willie" are represented so as to be identified with crime and evil, as antagonists and as means to denounce Nazi Germany's crimes. Their actions allow identification with Jewish suffering and struggle. The Jewish prisoners who fight and kill Nazi perpetrators can be understood as bringers of justice, by giving the Nazis in *Sobibor* what they deserved. The same can be stated about the American soldiers in *Private Ryan*.

Identification in *Private Ryan* is directed toward the American troopers led by Miller. "Steamboat Willie" reminds viewers that Nazis do not deserve mercy; Nazis are treacherous as they are evil, and the nameless Nazi soldier returns by the end of the film to kill the same sympathetic officer that allowed him to live. Corporal Upham's compassion is misplaced, as he comes to understand by shooting Willie. *Private Ryan* also creates a narrative that presents American soldiers as the total opposite of Nazi soldiers. The Americans are simple, "citizen soldiers" who have led normal off–war lives, and are called to arms to end the reign of Nazi Germany. As the Nazis are constantly identified as perpetrators of the Holocaust, the American soldiers can be viewed as the heroes who gave their lives in order to end it.

Nevertheless, the role of Nazi characters in Holocaust narratives starts to present nuances and changes from *Schinder's List* on. Steven Spielberg had certainly not intended to create a narrative of a Nazi hero; what critics have argued is that he chose

to center his narrative of the Holocaust on a German national, one of the few who had chosen to follow his own conscience instead of Hitler. The evil Nazis are present in *Schindler*, particularly Amon Goeth. Spielberg does not defend the Nazis: they are greedy, stupid, cruel, violent, brutal, and ultimately evil. But the director manages to portray one Nazi who saved Jewish prisoners instead of simply using them to make a profit, and acknowledges that not all Germans were the same. His film defies the commonly accepted evil stereotypes of Nazis represented by characters such as sergeant Wagner, suggesting that exceptions must be considered. Also, both *Schindler* and *Private Ryan* present accounts of what is called the "Americanization of the Holocaust", narratives were American characters are portrayed as saviors of persecuted people, and as resisters to Nazi actions and to Nazism.

Valkyrie appears to be much more a film about Tom Cruise and his status as a heroic persona on screen, than about Nazism and the July 20th conspiracy. Cruise's popularity and acting persona fit perfectly the characteristics of a character such as Stauffenberg. The character and the film's plot has much in common with others of Cruise's successes, specially the *Mission: Impossible* series. The mission to kill Hitler appears indeed as something nearly impossible to accomplish, and failure means certain death. Thus, Cruise represents Stauffenberg as similar to any American heroic characters the actor had previously depicted. The historical accounts of the real-life Stauffenberg are blurred by Cruise's persona. An Army officer, Stauffenberg was never identified by any historian as a perpetrator of the Holocaust; he may have known nothing whatsoever about the persecution and killing of the European Jewry, unlike many other conspirators who belonged to the SS and were deeply involved in atrocities against civilians, characters that the film never mentions or presents. In *Valkyrie* there are only the common Nazi identified with evil, such as Hitler, his close associates, the SS, and a small number of "good" Nazi characters, who also discuss the immediate termination of the camp's system's activities once Hitler is removed from power. Stauffenberg's Cruise defies the stereotyped notion usually bestowed to Nazi characters. The Nazi is a hero, but this can be better understood through the leading actor normal choice of roles, and his identification as one of the major Hollywood superstars of all time.

Hanna may well be the most complex of the six Nazi characters in the films. She may be cruel and inhuman, something that the film never presents, as there is no flashback to the moment of the Jewish prisoners' massacre, but she can be humane herself. Her possible identification with real Nazi agents further enhances the problem. Kate Winslet is identified with strong female performances, and instead of simply becoming an evil Nazi, she creates a humane character, projecting her as a less stereotyped example of the Nazi phenomenon and its agents. At the same time that she has life and death power over the prisoners, she is illiterate; she is accused of having committed an atrocity, but is sent to prison for refusing to be discovered as illiterate; she acknowledges the massacre, identifying it not with an arbitrary choice of doing harm, but as a legal measure to prevent the prisoners from escaping; the fire that killed the prisoners was started by an English bombardment over Germany; she may be identified with the Holocaust and all kinds of horrible acts for which Nazi Germany was responsible, but at the same time she is loving towards Michael. All these traits prove how her character is rich and complex, and how it departs from previous representations of Nazi characters.

According to Hayden White's remarks about narratives, recent films analyzed over the tenets of postmodern theory may present new narrative forms to plot and develop stories about Nazism, its agents, and the Holocaust. The three recent films addressed in this study also signal a crisis in master narratives, which problematizes the great divide between Nazism and the rest of the world, conceiving the first as a manifestation of evilness in the sense that the theme is comprehended from a Jewish-Christian mythologycal perspective. Wagner, Steamboat Willie, the Nazi doctor and others presented in such films are nevertheless cruel, coward, and despicable thugs, but even among the Nazi world one can find altruistic businessmen, brave and selfless army officers and even humane perpetrators. These micro stories, departing from master narratives of resistance and heroism such as World War II itself, are not defined and limited by them. The stories of Schindler, Stauffenberg and Hanna as presented in such films relativizes the evilness of Nazism in problematic ways, almost as if these stories would represent a micro narrative of people who present themselves not only as devilish evil but also as humane characters, in the case of

Schindler and Stauffenberg, involved in major horrors such as the Holocaust, who must choose on how to act in face of it. Hanna is of course the most problematic character due to her embodiment of the Nazi´s great horrors, but also her ignorance of her own condition.

FINAL COMMENTS

VALIDITY AND LIMITS OF POSTMODERN THEORY

This dissertation has dealt with the possibilities and limitations of postmodernism as a body of theoretical texts that have been instrumental to explain a number of films on the Holocaust produced from the 1908s on. Postmodern theory had made possible the revision of the history of the oppressed, marginalized and destituted people. Postmodernism brought attention and validated the stories of the African peoples, women, immigrants, gays and other minorities. This was possible through postmodernists' questioning of official history, signaling the need to complement history with counternarratives and micronarratives as opposed to macro perspectives.

When facing contemporary films which deal with Nazi Germany, revisionist perspectives face some particular challenges. The Nazis and Germans in general were never a persecuted or oppressed people. On the contrary: throughout World War II, the Nazis murdered several million people, devastated and ransacked Europe, and institutionalized mass murder and genocide. To address the Nazis as persecuted or having the same status of oppressed and marginalized people is an absurdity towards history, given the vastness of records demonstrating the enormity of Nazi Germany's atrocities, the Holocaust as the worst of the whole.

Nevertheless, the skepticism which moves postmodernism as a theory may help to elucidate particular issues regarding Nazi Germany and the Nazi Era. As argued along chapters II and III of this dissertation, the vast majority of Nazis and Germans alike were involved in, or behaved with indifference towards the atrocities. Nonetheless, a few people were able to present some form of resistance, either active or passive. *Schindler's List* and *Valkyrie* present their main characters as some of those who opposed Nazi Germany and its agents, by trying to stop Hitler in person through a coup, or in a more subtle way, to do something for the Holocaust victims. The films portray their stories and what became of them: Schindler survived and was able to rescue some 1,200 Polish Jews from almost certain death; Stauffenberg, the central character of *Valkyrie*, and his co–conspirators were

less lucky, and all but a few where swiftly executed. Of course, starring Tom Cruise in the main role somehow simplifies Stauffenberg for the best: his early support of the Nazi Party, and his actions during the first days of the war are never recreated. Also, in the film there is a small group of righteous German officers who cannot stand Hitler any more and join Stauffenberg in saving the same world the Nazis (and the German armies) were devastating a few moments before. Yet, top Nazis deeply involved in the regime's worst atrocities who took an active part in the same conspiracy (as historical records clearly demonstrate) are never presented in the film. Despite their flaws, *Schindler's List* and *Vakyrie* are supported by several historical records and accounts. Considering the limits of Hollywood's productions, these two films are understandable in their objective to recover these particular stories, never indulging in diminishing the horrors or the scope of Nazism and its crimes.

     The Reader, however, is much more complicated a film. As a very famous and talented actress, Kate Winslet tries her best to bring a new dimension to her character: a Nazi Holocaust perpetrator, who is the protagonist. It is a very rare moment in recent filmography in which one can see the Holocaust through the eyes of a confessed criminal. One of the main problems is that the filmic portrayal of Hanna Schmitz escapes the usual stereotype of an evil Nazi; she is never presented as a mass murderer, a torturer, inflicting pain and damage upon helpless Jewish victims. She is first portrayed as the object of desire of a very young and inexperienced German student, who knows nothing of her past and whose shock facing the truth paralells the audience's. Worse, a recollection of the crime is never shown in the film, leaving doubts regarding her responsibility; Yet, the film presents the other co–defendants as potentially more cruel and manipulative than Winslet's character. They simply isolate her and blame her for everything. In court, under duress from her co–defendants, and ashamed of the fact she is illiterate, Hanna takes on herself the full responsibility for the crime she is judged on, and is condemned to life imprisonment. Her deposition is full of drama and tears, as she is still somehow to be considered a victim of the system. Thus, the film confounds the roles of perpetrator and victim, casting an unnecessary doubt upon the actions of the protagonist; also, the film fails to notice that illiterate people were not accepted in the ranks of the SS. *The Reader* may stand for a

huge limit regarding postmodern theory: one must never forget, in spite of the humanity conveyed about Hanna Schmitz by Kate Winslet, that the character is a Nazi perpetrator and a murderer, a fact that is somehow erased from the screen and only suggested by oral narratives and dialogues.

SCHINDLER'S LIST AND VALKYRIE: COMPLEMENTING THE MASTER NARRATIVES THROUGH MICROHISTORIES

One of the main problems faced in this research was the portrayal of Nazi characters as heroes or resisters in the films made from the 1990s on here analyzed. The narratives in *Schindler's List* and *Valkyrie* present their leading characters as thus: Schindler is a rescuer who endangers his life in order to save targeted people; Stauffenberg goes beyond: he pays the ultimate price for challenging the Nazi regime.

Neither film intends to redeem or exonerate Nazis or the majority of Germans living during the war years. Schindler and Stauffenberg were obviously exceptions to the rule, but not the only ones; this dissertation tried to present some other few historical, documented accounts, proving that there was indeed resistance inside the Third Reich against Nazi policies, even against the Holocaust. The postmodern moment, which aims to recover minor or micro histories among master narratives, is able to help understand these films' choice of recovering such stories. Instead of focusing on the exploits of American and other allied soldiers and agents, long recognized as having helped to hold back and destroy Nazi Germany, these films are also capable to shed some light on the fact that some Germans are able to appear in a different way regarding the Nazi years: going beyond the stereotypes of cruelty and evil in films such as *Sophie's Choice*, *Escape From Sobibor* and *Saving Private Ryan* (among many others), *Schindler's List* and *Valkyrie* propose a revision regarding this particular stereotype: they indicate that not all Germans were Nazis, that sometimes resistance came from the inside, and that even in some of the worst moments of History a few people were able to offer help against all odds.

Thus, the particular microhistories of Oskar Schindler and Klaus von Stauffenberg demonstrate that horrors such as the

Holocaust and Nazism as a whole are, in great part, a matter of choice. These two characters choose to behave differently, as some few others did, and they stood for the consequences of their choices. Of course, using the talents of particularly famous film stars, such as Liam Neeson and Tom Cruise, their anti–Nazi Germans are likewise softened versions of their historical counterparts. But even historical records show how they were never involved in the regime's crimes, validating the film's approches. In its turn, postmodernism, in this moment characterized as the crisis of master narratives, is a suitable theory to understand the representation of both films: by rejecting a master, totalizing, definitive account of History, which is one of the major postmodern claims, *Schindler's List* and *Valkyrie* stand as microhistories about heroism and goodness among the vastness of the Nazi Germany's atrocities.

REVISIONING NAZI CHARACTERS: POSSIBILITIES, LIMITS AND DANGERS

The comparison among the films analyzed in this dissertation – the Nazi villains in *Sophie's Choice*, *Escape From Sobibor* and *Saving Private Ryan*, and the German heroes and resisters of *Schindler's List* and *Valkyrie*, as well as the Nazi perpetrator in *The Reader*, which is a clearly diferent character from those of the previous films – suggests that the recent films are able to present somehow a shift in their representations of Nazi Germans. Although these filmic portrayals of Schindler, Stauffenberg and Hanna Schmitz are not really more complex representations of Germans, nevertheless, they are indeed different from previous stereotypes, standing as a revision of Nazi characters within the Hollywood industry. Schindler is a Nazi Party member and Stauffenberg wears the Nazi uniform, but they are heroes in their outfits; the most intriguing case, however, is Hanna Schmitz. She is a Nazi criminal, a Holocaust perpetrator; yet, there is a strong effort by Winslet to bring some humanity to her, in a completely new way, when compared to characters such as Gustav Wagner. Hanna's feelings help to portray her as humane, instead of the cold brutal creature as depicted in Gustav Wagner's and other Nazi characters.

Thus, Schindler and Stauffenberg may stand for interesting possibilities regarding the presentation of German characters living through the Nazi age. Historical records agree on the fact that they where resisters, and never acted in a criminal way regarding the people oppressed by Nazi Germany. They help the viewer to remember other cases of resistance, such as Kurt Gerstein (who was also the subject of a film directed by Costa Gavras, 2002's *Amen*) and Konrad Morgen, the SS judge who tried to hold up the Holocaust by arresting top Nazi officers, among them *Schindler's List* antagonist Amon Goeth. Their reports are limited by historical accounts: even by being considered microhistories, theirs is a very well documented case.

This is not what happens with *The Reader*. Winslet's film reveals the limits of the revision of Nazi Germany's history. Historical distance may allow representations as such to become a reality, but the critic's work is to demonstrate where the filmic account echoes reality and where it constitutes a fantasy, which endangers memory by allowing an erasure of Nazi history, which was essentially one of oppression, mass murder, terror and barbarism, something that postmodern theory would never endorse.

The risk of deleting history, which is enhanced by the distancing from the past, may offer great danger. Filmic representations suggest that, despite the brutality of the regime, there was a sort of "everyday normality" to people's lives during the Nazi years. Worse yet, films may appear to endorse the notion that other peoples were responsible for particular acts of brutality and horror (which appears to be the case with German historian Ernst Nolte, who claims that the Soviets were no better than the Nazis), making the Nazis simply another case among many. Horrible as they are, the recent massacres in the war in Yugoslavia and the Rwanda Genocide cannot be equated with Nazi Germany's, considering the scope and the number of victims. I do clearly defend the notion that Nazism was not simply another case of horror: no other political program in the world has institutionalized genocide as an industrial undertaking so far. Perhaps this is what makes the resistance stories so precious: one man may have the power to make a difference, if he chooses to do so. Thus, the analysis so far may allow the answer to our research questions, as follows.

Regarding the representation of Nazi characters in *Schindler's List*, *Valkyrie* and *The Reader*, one of the main issues was to identify more complex ways of portrayal. Perhaps in these films they are not presented in more complex ways, but certainly in very different ones. The sequences analyzed in the six films of this research clearly demonstrate that the German characters in them do not act in the same manner in the first and second group of films. The first three films (*Sophie's Choice*, *Escape From Sobibor*, and *Saving Private Ryan*) have characters portraying Nazis in the expected way, as villains; however, in the second group of films, Schindler and Stauffenberg are portrayed as heroes and resisters, and Hanna Schmitz, although not a hero or resister, is clearly a very different kind of Nazi perpetrator, from those in the earlier films: using the talents of a very skilled performer, and also her beautiful figure, the film creates a depiction of a perpetrator who is able to demonstrate feelings. This is a major departure: Gustav Wagner is simply a cold–blooded killer, a stereotype of a Nazi character, nevertheless in convergence with historical records; the Nazi doctor in *Sophie's Choice* stands for the same: he appears briefly, and his actions create major torment and pain for Sophie. Hanna's depiction confronts us with her banal simplicity: one may see only her beauty, her kindness towards Michael, her inability to understand her horrible crime. In this sense, her portrayal demonstrates at least some degree of complexity.

The three films may also stand as examples of some of the recent portrayals of historical characters in the media. They deal not only with Nazi history, but also with representation of recent History, a representation that starts to emerge due to the distancing from the events they depict. This distancing may allow the rise of new possibilities, not only for Nazi stories; perhaps there could have been a friar who tried to denounce the horrors of the witch hunts (Rudolf von Spee)[1]; a priest who defended the natives against the Spanish settlers of the New World (Bartolomé de Las Casas)[2]; a Japanese diplomat who saved Lithuanian Jews

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1 Sagan 393.

2 Zinn 483.

by issuing visas for them out of the country (Chiune Sugihara)[3] among other cases. Most recently, Matthew McCounaghey starred in a film about how a southern defector created a militia, which took nearly half of Mississipi from the hands of the Confederacy during the American Civil War.[4] These stories also testify to the importance of researching more deeply into historical micronarratives.

Regarding new representations, the recent German minisseries *Generation War* (2013) also deals with Germans who do not comply with Nazi crimes (with the exception of one of the five main characters, who takes active part in massacres against Russian civilians). One of the main characters is Jewish, and he is protected by the others and actually survives the Holocaust. Apparently, this plot device reminds one that there were some "good Germans". Nevertheless, the series shows the Russians being as brutal as the Nazis and the Polish as a nation of anti–Semites.

Thus, the films from the second group here analyzed could be seen as being informed by postmodernist theories that have questioned the validity of oficial history and have opened new grounds for micronarratives. *Schindler's List*, *Valkyrie* and *The Reader* are but a few in a major group of German and American films such as those already briefly discussed is this dissertation: *The White Ribbon*, *Downfall*, *Generation War*, to name a few. They ask their viewers to take the position of the perpetrator; perhaps, this means that to understand the extremely complex phenomenon of Nazism, one may have to face the challenge to see things through the eyes of the people who did the atrocities. In *The Reader*, what remains the major problem is to view some characters as human beings rather than simple–minded monsters. But this film in particular testifies to the dangers of relativizing a Holocaust perpetrator, and of using cinematic devices to efface the consequences of her crime. This specific film reminds one that a limit must be drawn: Hanna is played by Kate Winslet, which brings a huge weight to the role; her association with

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3 Hillel Levine argues that Sugihara saved "as many 10,000 people" (236).

4 *Free State of Jones* (Gary Ross, 2016).

heroines functions in the same manner as Cruise's portrayal of Stauffenberg does. Nevertheless, Stauffenberg's story was real and is well documented; Hanna is pure fiction, and as I have tried to demonstrate before, the female SS were not better than the men; also, no one could be admitted as an SS member if proved illiterate. The fact is that postmodernism must not be used to explain her actions as portrayed in the film: Hanna may have been unable to understand her actions fully, but she was never a victim.

Considering the films *Sophie's Choice*, *Escape From Sobibor*, and *Saving Private Ryan*, the representation of Nazi characters has exclusively been one of cruelty, crime, barbarism; Nazis would be employed to be the antagonists in the many films about the war and/or the Holocaust, but more recently their representation suffered the shift mentioned earlier, where even Nazis can resist Nazi policies. What must be clear is that these films do not aim to redeem or diminish the scope of the brutal crimes committed by the Nazi regime, but solely to recover some minor dramatic stories about particular characters.

The cultural and historical contexts of events, as reproduced in the 1990s films, are perceived at a chronological distance from the events as they took place. When *Schindler's List* was produced, nearly half a century had gone by since the end of World War II. The other two films showed up fifteen years later than *Schindler*. By then, several thousand Nazis had been prosecuted and brought to justice; the Soviets, and more recently, the Arabs became the antagonists of the West and the values associated with democracy. These microhistories of resistance within the German nation under Nazism are what those films appear to recover.

POSTMODERNISM AND ETHICAL LIMITS

Despite its characteristic skepticism towards official history, expressed notably by the distrust of grand narratives, it is important never to forget that postmodernism should not be used to justify or accept everything. What the Nazis did is beyond doubt and is very well documented, especially in relation to the Holocaust. What postmodernism rejects is absolute statements. As Zygmunt Baumann argues, "the novelty of the postmodern

approach to ethics consists first and foremost in the rejection of the tippically modern ways of going about its moral problems, that is, the philosophical search for absolutes, universals and foundations in theory" (03–04). Considering his statement, one may argue that not all Germans were Nazis, as some few resisted; Nazism adherence was not universal in Germany, and in many other countries people fought for the Nazis, notably Russian Anti–Communist battalions, such as Vlasov's Liberation Army and Bronislav Kaminski's RONA, and engaged in major atrocities against civilians.

Postmodernist theory never threw ethics aside. As Richard Rorty states, "it is one thing to say, falsely, that there is nothing to choose between us and the Nazis. It is another thing to say, correctly, that there is no neutral, common ground to argue our differences" (10). *Schindler's List* and *Valkyrie* are precisely about that. The main characters in these two films live inside and work with the regime, but choose in a completely different way. Their morality is not neutral either: their choices deal with saving people in the first case, and killing a dictator to end the war, in the second. Dealing with such choices, this may be the reason why Rorty calls the possibility of ethics in postmodernism a matter of "right action" (16). The author argues that there is an abyss between the kind of "ethics" defended by the Nazis, and the kind postmodernism defends: "the Nazis and I will always strike one another as begging all the crucial questions, arguing in circles" (15). Rorty's statements may remind us that one has the right to fight for his or her moral views. Perhaps, it is possible to acknowledge that each particular community (such as the Nazi one) is able to see moral standards in its members' actions and choices, even by governing which moral choices its people are allowed to make: Schindler and Stauffenberg choose one way; Hanna chooses the other.

Thus, what moves the characters is not any particular notion of extreme relativism, a common criticism bestowed upon postmodernism, but simply their choice. Postmodern theory breaks in to remember that even inside the Nazi State such choices were possible without compromising ethics. Postmodernism would not defend or endorse a representation such as Hanna's, although it may allow us to see her character as different, when compared to other Nazi characters' portrayals. The ethical problem that may surface due to such possible

relativism has been solved by many critics, some of whom I quickly address here once more. Hayden White stated that postmodernism deals with "interpretations and the many possibilities that surface from interpretations themselves, but not through offensive transgression or against at least some historical logic that can be found through the careful examination of reality" (77). It is important to remember that for White, Nazi revisionism is nothing more than "total lies" (77). Also, Tom Stempel states that narratives, subjective as they are, do not allow or excuse "a motion picture's fooling with the evidence" (Stempel 167). This is especially true through its defense of micronarratives given by the crisis of master narratives, and instead of promoting "a debilitating relativism that permits any manipulation of the evidence", as argued by White (76), what postmodernism actually does is to allow the enrichment of historical readings, and open new grounds for research into the construction and understanding of representations.

OTHER FILMS, MORE POSSIBILITIES

As stated before, there are many other films which portray Nazism and its agents in a different light. They remain as good possibilities for further studies. Adolf Hitler is remembered as a powerful speaker, given to raging outbursts. In *Downfall* he is also represented as a wretched, miserable, weakened old man. *Downfall* even depicts a few SS members concerned about the well–being of the poor German people tormented by the Russian invaders, such as doctor Ernst Gunther–Schenck (Christian Berkel). *Sophie Scholl: Die Letzten Tage* (2005) is about a young German resister murdered by the Nazis for opposing Hitler; *The Book Thief* (2013) also presents a young girl living in Berlin who becomes a war victim. There is the account of Hamburg's *Swing Kids* (1993), and the German war film *Stalingrad* (1993), which depicts heroic German soldiers fighting the Soviets. These and many other stories may constitute valid research objectives in order to understand the many possibilities and complexities regarding the representation of World War II, Nazi Germany and the Holocaust in recent films.

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