

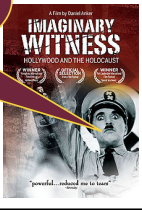
Heroes and Villains in Holocaust Films

The Hollywood Tradition,
Authenticity, and Discourse of History

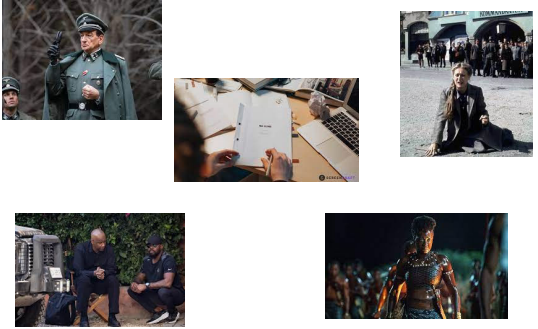
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“Ethos of Hollywood is first of all the art of the middle, that is, it’s meant to appeal to everyone.” ~Neal Gabler

Ticket sales, selling commercial time, or film as art?



Hollywood & Character Development



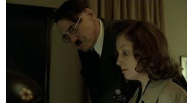
Identify with Characters – the Villains



Operation Finale
Ben Kingsley as Adolf Eichmann



Conspiracy
Stanley Tucci as Adolf Eichmann
Kenneth Branagh as Reinhard Heydrich



Downfall
Alexandra Maria Lara as Traudl Junge



Downfall
Bruno Ganz as Adolf Hitler



Heino Ferch as Albert Speer

Moral
Compasses

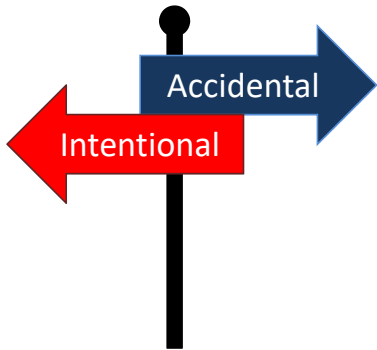
Identify with Characters - the Heroes

Koster "...wasn't tortured about his decision [to help]. People in morally ambiguous situations can be the most interesting characters. But this guy was not morally ambiguous. It's why some people **may find him hard to believe.**"



Source: Clyde Haberman, "A Country's Response to the Nazis: No," New York Times, 27 May 1998.

Origins of Behavior



Consequences of Behavior



Operation Finale



Wallenberg, A Hero's Story



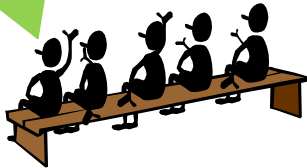
Judgment at Nuremberg



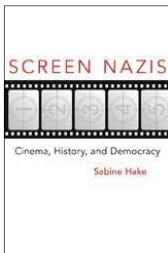
Schindler's List



Why are historians troubled about how the Hollywood tradition impacts a film about Holocaust villains or heroes?



Oversimplification Distorts Complexity



"villains, clichéd madmen and voiceless, faceless extras."

Portrayed with too much or too little masculinity, deviant sexuality, or dysfunctional personalities. (p. 21-23)

Oversimplification Distorts Complexity



The Grey Zone



Ralph Fiennes as Amon Goeth in Schindler's List



Scenes from Schindler's List



Unique to the Third Reich

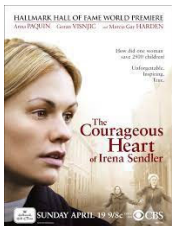
Perpetrator's Motives

Die hard Nazi

Conformist



Oversimplification Distorts Complexity



Miracle at Midnight

Defiance



Choiceless Choices

Myra L. quoted in *Holocaust Testimonies*:

Myra was a nurse in a ghetto hospital. All the patients were being deported to the east. A cousin of hers attempts to hide but the Germans find her and drags her away. The cousin screamed at Myra to save her, but Myra did nothing. "I couldn't save her. I also feared that I can be taken instead. And that's another thing that worked on me – that I couldn't save her. I did not probably want to go for ... my cousin the survival will was so big that nobody was sacrificing himself for anybody else."

Langer, *Holocaust Testimonies*, 126.

Will you understand?

Joan B, quoted in *Holocaust Testimonies*:

"You see, with a logical mind like yours [the interviewer], or other people who try to think this out, [for] a rule that's being followed, or [for] a certain way that [they] think, [or] had thought out and would do things – there was no such thing. . . . There was no set rule. . . . Just killing, that's all."

"Normality"?

Survivor of Kovno Ghetto:

"For us normal meant the absence of mass executions or deportations. It meant having just enough food to exist. ... It meant survival of the community while individuals were shot. It meant life behind barbed wires, like criminals, like slave laborers without rest or relaxation. This was normal in the ghetto."

Audience Expectations

“Vocabulary of Purpose”

- hope
- redemption
- something good

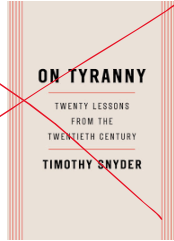
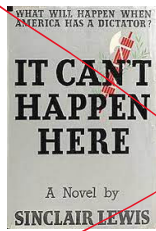
Reinforces American Individualism



Reinforces American Individualism



Reinforces American Individualism and Exceptionalism





Villainous actions?

1. Killers
2. "desk murderers"
3. Torturers
4. Medical experiments
5. Conformity
6. Indifference



Potential Goals of Portraying Villains:

1. Transformation from good to evil
2. Morality lesson
3. Sadistic, monstrous → one dimensional
4. Banality of evil



Actors' Challenge

Tom Jicha, TVRadio Writer, reviewing *Conspiracy* and Kenneth Branagh on playing Reinhard Heydrich and Stanley Tucci on playing Adolf Eichmann:

Jicha notes, "Heydrich was such a diabolically ruthless individual, it was difficult for Branagh to meet the actor's obligation to find the humanity in his character. Heydrich and Eichmann 'seem to be without soul, without conscience. One of the disturbing elements of playing it was to discover that,' Branagh says.

"Still, 'You have to portray them as people because that's what they were Tucci says. That the point of the film to me. They weren't monsters. They were people. They ate and slept like we do and they had families. I was able to find Eichmann's own words and find that, yes, there was something like a sense of humor sometimes. And there was supposedly a love for children. ..."

Source: Tom Jicha, *South Florida Sun-Sentinel* (Fort Lauderdale, FL), 19 May 2001, 10.

John Koch, "HBO's *Conspiracy* more banal than evil" (*Boston Globe*, 19 May 2001: G. 12.)

"Although the production is smooth and professional, it fails to leave much of an impression. Branagh, looking suavely Aryan with dyed-blond, slicked-back hair, speaks fast to suggest nimble intelligence and impatient ambition. In the revealing HBO press notes, he admits that as hard as he worked on the Heydrich role, when it came down to playing him, the inner man seemed invisible. There isn't much at the core of the Heydrich character or *Conspiracy*, the effect of which is to make the telemovie often seem as coarse as the blasé Wannsee conferees.

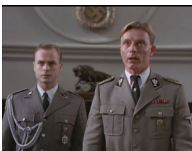
"Among them was the infamous and unrepentant Eichmann, oddly played by Stanley Tucci. He's wrong for the part, not only physically but because he projects a current of nervous emotion, where the real Eichmann was supposedly affectless. Because Eichmann-Tucci acts as a kind of *maitre d'* at Wannsee, you can't help thinking of "Tucci's charming performance as a restaurateur in the lighthearted *Big Night*.

The rest of the actors are technically impressive, especially David Threlfall as Dr. Frederick Wilhelm Kritzinger, the lone voice of relative sanity and scruple at the fateful gathering. Colin Firth is effective as Dr. Wilhelm Stuckart, whose efforts to tailor the final solution to existing German law make some of his remarks sound humane when they are only dementedly legalistic.

"In trying to evoke the banality of evil, the filmmakers haplessly succumb to it. Purely as a Cliffs Notes account of an important historic event, perhaps *Conspiracy* has some value. But as comment or reflection on the perversions of humanity at Wannsee, it fails. Where exactly is its perspective? It seems as well-oiled and dangerously facile as the grisly proceedings it dramatizes."

Misrepresentations

1. Risk developing empathy
2. Exaggerated monstrosity (unrelatable)
3. Just following orders
4. Excessively didactic



Villains

Movies

- *Eichmann*
- *The Empty Mirror*
- *Good*
- *Judgment at Nuremberg*
- *The Statement*

Television

- *Conspiracy*
- *Hitler: The Rise of Evil*
- *Hitler's SS: Portrait in Evil*
- *Nuremberg*
- *Twilight Zone: Deaths-Head Revisited*

More difficult to label:

- *Amen*
- *The Grey Zone*

Hitler: Rise of Evil

- Goal of the film is to explain how Hitler came to hate Jews and foreign enemies with deadly consequences.
- Released: 2003; Director: Christian Duguay
- What impression are you given about Hitler?
- How are the origins of his evil explained?



Heroic Actions

1. Armed resistance
2. Rescue
3. Sabotage
4. Relief efforts
5. Just surviving?
6. Non-conformity?



This priest provided shelter to the Jewish people.



Goals of portraying altruistic, heroic behavior

- 1. Highlight the happening
- 2. Explore origins of altruism or bravery

Misrepresentations?

- 1. Exaggerate deeds
- 2. Foolishly sentimental (maudlin)
- 3. Didactic (teach too much, boring)
- 4. Saintry, unobtainable, un-relatable
- 5. Jews as "objects" who need rescued, lacking agency

Heroes

Movie

- *The Assisi Underground*
- *A Day in October*
- *Defiance*
- *Hanna's War*
- *The Hiding Place*
- *Schindler's List*
- *The Visas that Saved Lives*

Television

- *The Attic: The Hiding of Anne Frank*
- *Charlie Grant's War*
- *Courageous Heart of Irena Sendler*
- *Escape from Sobibor*
- *Haven*
- *Hidden in Silence*
- *Miracle at Midnight*
- *The Scarlet and the Black*
- *Uprising*
- *Varian's War*
- *The Wall*
- *Wallenberg*
