

From Schindler's Ark to Schindler's List: Analysis of Adapted Foil Characters

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Abstract:

Amon Goeth and Oscar Schindler are adapted from real life to the novel and to the film. They have been presented in a way as they appear as foil to each other. The study applies Foucauldian analytical theory to evaluate these two characters. In terms of their appearance, dressing, voice, accent, actions, the time camera captures them in the film, the sentences utilized for describing the characters in the novel, the camera shots and angles, their behavior with the opposite gender and for their emotions they both get different treatments. This differentiation is more implicit in the film than the novel. The aim is to trace evidence from the process of adaption from the novel to film to know how the characters of Amon and Oscar are presented in contrast, yet they share some characteristics which can be explored by applying Foucauldian theory. For Amon the people seemed nothing else but bodies for whom he could sentence death at any time, for Oscar people would happily offer sacrificial golden teeth. The factors which make these two characters powerful or weak, beneficial or harmful, savior or oppressor, liberator or enslaver, and kind or cruel also make them as poles apart binaries.

Keywords: *Amon Goeth, Oscar Schindler, Foucauldian analysis, foil, adaptation*

1. Introduction

While adapting from Schindler's Ark to Schindler's List the director, in an attempt of adapting the protagonist Oscar Schindler and the antagonist Amon Goeth used one as a foil to the other. Usually, the function of the foil characters is to highlight the qualities of the protagonists through their follies serious or humorous. John Milton depicted the character of Satan in a glorified way because his purpose was to put something against the ultimate Good, the Creator, in the Paradise Lost Book 1, so the evil of Satan was there to highlight the Mercy of God and the humility of Adam. In the film the characters of Schindler and Goeth are both adapted from the novel in a way that their antagonism can be seen through their power relation with the common people and through their sexual relations with the opposite gender.

To rule the hearts of the people one needs gratitude in one's behavior and this quality of Schindler was accepted by Goeth. Their conversation which started from Goeth's comment that Schindler possessed the power to resist the intoxication of alcohol, paves way for Foucauldian Analysis. The theory of power by Foucault can explain how the desire to achieve power to suppress people stands in opposition to the unasked for and willing sacrifice of golden teeth by a smiling old Jew for making Schindler's gold ring. Why one is hated and the other is loved and how both are different, yet they complement each other are important questions that can throw light on these adapted characters which are not merely fictional, but they existed and saved or ruined thousands of lives through their influential destructive and constructive powers.

Another significant aspect of both these characters is their sexuality. Being apparently perfect they enjoyed attraction from the opposite genders. Schindler's marital life as adapted in the film shows that he enjoys the company of mistresses and his wife knows about it. However, the novelist used some subjective remarks on Schindler's marital life and its failures. Being kind to the females he never mistreats them. His keenness in the film, varied with the varying age and attractiveness of the personal secretaries he auditioned. A girl who bought expensive clothes to meet Schindler wanted to get her parents admitted in his factory which was a heaven for the poor Jews. She was at first dealt with harshly which was the only exception in the movie but later her parents were brought

from Krakow. This shows his kindness which made him rule over the hearts and souls of the people as well as the audience.

The relationship of Amon Goeth with Helen Hirsch was debased, oppressive, cruel and harsh. Being a racist he knew he would never accept her Jewish origins but on the other hand the way he selected a “very lucky girl” as a maid for her shows his obsession with purity when he first asked who had an experience of serving as a maid, he claimed that he would not want a girl who had been someone else’s maid. Helen did not raise her hand and hence from day one her self-respect became extremely attractive for his confused adoration for her.

On the one hand Amon would beat her and yet he would not allow her to wear her Jewish badge shows that his fascination for her was like madness. This relationship appears more baseless when Oscar Schindler appears on the scene as a rescuer. Amon at first refuses but later he sells her life for the highest price which Schindler could pay. Hence in the presence of the cruel oppressor the value of the kind liberator increases to the maximum level, just as in the presence of a devil the value of Savior would be felt more. Hence Amon is a foil to Schindler in the adapted movie. In many ways the presence of Amon highlights and glorifies the characters of Schindler.

1.1 Objectives

- To find evidence from the text and the film in order to support the notion that Amon stands as a foil to Oscar Schindler
- To analyze the depiction of these characters adapted from the novel to film in the light of Foucault’s theory of discourse analysis

1.2 Research questions

1. How far does the director adapt the characters of Amon Goeth and Oscar Schindler from the novel to the film as foil to each other?
2. How far does the theory of Foucault explain these characters’ power relation with general people and with opposite gender?
3. How far these characters are same or different in their power to rule?

2.Literature Review

The novel Schindler’s Ark (1982) threw light on the work of humanity by a German which initially received criticism from Holocaust research community that it would mitigate the horrors of six million massacred Jews (Blum, 1997). Such examples of humanity put a question mark to those who only blame Nazis and say that nothing could have been done in such situations. Schindler’s list is the manifestation of edifying power of the Hollywood because it manipulates the emotions and disguises the melodrama of actual realization from history. It shows the point of view of perpetrators. Film’s energy is largely gathered from the conflict between Oscar Schindler and Amon Goeth who function as each other’s “symbolic doubles” and “the contrast is regularly drawn (Bernstein, 1994, p. 429)”.

Adaptation can be split into “borrowing (where the film hopes to win an audience because of the reputation of the source, intersecting (in which the cinema records its confrontation with an ultimately intransigent text) and transforming (where the adaptation faithfully reproduces a literary text to the screen) (Dudley, 1984, p. 99) as cited in (Cartmel & Wheleham, 2007). Adaptation to cinematic creations can be directly proportional to fidelity. Just as word-to-word translation or free translation becomes worthless, a good adaptation in fact restores the essence of its source (Bazin, 1970).

“Both Schindler and Goeth remain stylized figures that fail to transcend the handsome silhouette of the average Hollywood film (Hartman, 1995, p. 128)”. The scene of Goeth and Schindler on the subject of power remains in the frame of power game hence the scene appears “psychologically credible” (Hartman, 1995, p. 128).

“Foreshadowing, like anything that creates the effect of a fateful essential condition, is disempowering, because it removes the sense of that there might be any possibility of the outcome of an event happening differently (Skoller, 1996, p. 133)”. Foreshadowing of one character over the other character by the director and novelist leads to certain gaps in the process of characterization. This study focuses on how the two characters are portrayed in contrast to each other.

2. Methodology:

Keeping in view the objectives of the study, the qualitative data was collected from the novel, film and from the interviews available on the internet. Foucauldian analysis was applied to analyze and interpret the data. Hence this method of critical discourse analysis was used to analyze the data.

4. Analysis

4.1 Adaptation of characters of Amon and Oscar:

Both characters are unequally treated, they are same yet different. Both are powerful yet they receive different fate. Following points explain their complementing differences.

4.1.1 First appearance on page and screen:

In the novel Oscar Schindler is introduced with great depth and insight. His early life and events of that life are briefly described in prologue and in the first two chapters we find nothing else but Oscar. In the film this protagonist has been given much importance, but the film begins with the practice of Sabbath. Prologue displayed the details of Oskar’s father mother, his childhood days, early careers, his father’s disapproval of his first marriage with a farmer’s daughter, his hatred for his father’s behavior with his mother and his saving a Jewish boy with blood running from his nose all of which are not shown in the movie which is much longer than usual because it is of 3 hours and 15 minutes. All these deletions and revisions serve the directorial purpose of putting more emphasis on the Jewish history.

In the film he is introduced differently. The audience is not shown the man but his expensive dress and accessories first, after which camera follows him in the restaurant where he bribes his way in. He is shown to be seen by two unknown people through a frame. He sends a bottle of alcohol as a gift to the guests of the reserved table and tells the waiter to tell them it’s from him. After that the old man pleasantly speaks his name ‘Oscar Schindler’ and finally introduces the man to the audience. On the other hand Amon receives almost the same treatment in the novel and in the film. Only some subtitle in the film introduces Amon Goeth to the audience. If Amon was understood as a war criminal than so was Oscar a savior, then why did the director give almost a surprising and long introduction to Oscar? This shows that the director adapted the characters in a way to show superiority of Oscar which was for them understood and preconceived.

4.1.2 Dressing:

Oscar is shown in the film as a well-dressed man till the end. However, Amon can be observed half naked or first two buttons of his shirt as lost. Even in the scene where both are drinking alcohol this pattern of dressing can be seen in both characters. While Oscar was calm and composed, Amon seemed drunk and intoxicated. In the influence of alcohol, he appreciated that Oscar had control and power over himself while Amon could not hold his back with the chair. Amon was half naked in a bedroom scene, and in the same half-dressed manner he started firing at innocent people. This must be because the costume designer would want Oscar to look like a decent gentleman in all manners whereas Amon was more of a beast than a civilized human being.

4.1.3 Language, tone, and accents:

While adapting from the page to screen the characters in fact both are shown as Germans, yet Amon’s accent is more German whereas Oscar speaks plainly without showing any Germanic influence in his accent. This creates

stereotype in the form of Amon and further distances him from the English-speaking audience. In the novel the written expressions show English influences like the spellings of words have ‘c’ instead of ‘k’ whereas in the film ‘direktor’ is written on the windowpane of Oscar’s office door with ‘k’ which shows influence of German language. For the novel it served no specific purpose of retaining the English way of writing but in the film, it creates a realistic atmosphere where the director went with his crew to the original locations in Germany to film major parts of movie. So, writing direktor instead of director enables the audience to view things from closer way.

Amon is sarcastic at many places in the film when he asked for making hinges and when he makes fun of Oscar for kissing a Jewish girl in his birthday party. He is ironic when he talks to Oscar about power and pardoning. On the other hand, Oscar is never shown to be sarcastic he is rather courteous and full of gratitude. This divide creates a binary among these characters that are opposite to each other hence play the role of foil to each other.

4.1.4 Treatment with the thirsty prisoners:

In the film Oscar is found asking the water carrier to throw the water on the prison train cells where the people were left thirsty. Amon pointed that Schindler was giving those about to be dead people some hope, and he laughed with his other SS Commandants. This contrastive behavior shows how poles apart these two are with respect to kindness and cruelty.

4.1.5 Relationship with opposite gender:

The novel provides details about Schindler’s early marriage, his failed marital relationship, his keenness for having mistresses. The novelist uses adjectives like minor god of rescue, childlike frankness, handsome etc. for Oscar Schindler. His appeal for the opposite gender is much more than that of Amon because of his kind behavior. The novelist provides details of Oscar’s failed businesses and marriage whereas only a sentence is written in subtitle of the movie to indicate his unhappy marriage. This might be because the director portrays a favorable picture of Oscar or perhaps there was lesser time left to present that. It seems unnecessary in the movie because Oscar as a human being was largely depicted through his relationship with humanity and through his saving more than thousand people and this quality makes all his weakness in the background.

In the movie when his wife Emily comes to meet him, she finds another girl already there, which she does not mind much, hence what is written in the novel in one sentence that Oscar would enjoy the company of other ladies under the very nose of his wife is elaborately depicted in the movie. In the film however no reaction of Emily his wife neutralizes the effects of this weakness of Schindler.

4.1.6 Camera shots and angles:

In the film there was a careful use of camera shots and angles which suited the film as far as the subject matter was concerned. No abrupt camera movement and no zoom in or zoom out shots depict the auteur’s delicate handling of the serious subject matter. However, there are traces in the use of camera movements and angling, lighting, and framing that foreground the role of Schindler when Amon is put on a comparison with him.



SS Commandant Among Goeth (Ralph Fiennes), left, and Oskar Schindler (Liam Neeson) conduct a gentlemanly negotiation for human lives in Steven Spielberg’s *Schindler’s List*.

Picture 1 as cited in (Doherty, 1994) shows Oscar at a higher place, though there exists a height difference but closely looking at their shoulders may reveal this foregrounding of Schindler over Goeth.

In the beginning when an unknown man is shown getting ready the camera keeps this man hidden; only his expensive clothes cuff links, tie and coat are shown. This arose curiosity in the audience to know more about this apparently well-dressed man. Immediately after that there is a dolly shot; in which the camera follows the same character from behind. This camera movement of following the path of Schindler makes the audience to assume that there is someone special to come. After that Schindler is seen when the camera views him from a low angle from which he appears taller and bigger. Liam Neeson, who is already a tall man appears gracefully taller in this angle of the camera. This is one way of showing a man as greater and larger than life. This use of camera angle is frequent when the audience finds Schindler in any situation of the movie like Oscar mounted on a horse, in the car, in the restaurant, talking to his wife etc.

When we first see Amon, he is a sneezing man suffering from cold. The camera takes his mid shot, which later turns into a long shot and then full shot. This use of camera enables the audience to view him from distance and it further distances Amon from the viewers later in full shot. The most significance distancing can be observed from the famous scene where Amon and Oscar discuss about the power over the table when Amon is almost intoxicated by alcohol and Oscar remains unaffected. In the scene when Oscar talks camera views him from a lower point where he appears big and overpowering. The audience sees Oscar dominating over the debate. In the same scene when the audience sees Amon the camera appears to view Amon from a higher point. This must be because Amon was drunk, and he could not hold himself equal to Oscar. This camera angle makes the audience look down upon Amon (the pun implied).

If there would have been the use of eye level angle through the depiction of Amon and Oscar, the audience would not perceive any conflict or unequal status of both these hence, in doing so the auteur established higher and lower positions of these characters. Complementing each other at unequal positions the characters both reinforce each other's characteristic qualities, and they are vital for each other's identification. Oscar would not appear so kind if there had been no Amon, likewise Amon's cruelty appears harsher with Helen Hirsh in front of Oscar's gentle and healing kiss.

4.1.7 Gradual changes in characters; physical, psychological, and emotional:

Amon becomes physically fat and his flat character does not undergo any persistent psychological or emotional changes. His only physical change shown to the audience through a round tummy makes him a caricature. On the other hand, there is no change in appearance of Oscar, who remains handsome and smart. However, Oscar is a vibrant character fully affected by circumstances and his transformation on psychological and emotional grounds make him full of life.

4.1.8 Their endings:

By the time Amon is hanged he gains 16 pounds weight in the film. Just before being hanged, he says hail Hitler in such a way as it all appears comic. Though he is not shown dying yet his comic way of being hanged shows that instead of getting poetic justice something worse was meant to be shown; a caricature of Amon. On the other hand, the parting speech of Oscar and his emotional departure with a souvenir of a gold ring carved with a message from torah makes him appear kinder and more humane. Later in the colored part of the movie the actors with their counterparts from real life the survivors of that holocaust are shown placing pebbles on the tombstone of Oscar Schindler. The way their deaths are portrayed has a deep message. Death is inevitable, yet the one who saves one life is as if he has saved the whole humanity.

4.2 Seeing through the lens of Foucault:

4.2.1 The attainment of power:

“Power is only tolerable acceptable and so can only work, in portion that it hides its own mechanism, in so far as it is seen as purely a limit on freedom (1990, p. 9).” It used to be a form of religious obligation to have power over the life and death of the people; to require citizens to go on war, and announce death penalty to those who don’t. It was from that time that people attained power to seize or steal things from others, their time of life, their wages, and even their bodies (1990). Amon and all other Nazis became the tools in the hands of Hitler. They took people’s belongings, their relatives, dear ones in fact all assets of their lives were under their control in the Jewish camps. The Nazi regime exercised their use of power over the bodies and lives of people in all the above-mentioned ways. It being an unacceptable form of power, did not work for them because they could not regulate the lives of people.

Power over the lives of people can be observed in two forms; discipline and bio political regulations; the former designed barracks, schools and workshops, whereas the latter emphasized on health, migration and demography (1990). While Amon focused on making prison camps and barracks, Oscar’s focus was on demography of his employees. Hence both had influence and power but only the latter could sustain and was willingly served.

Knowledge can be used by the powerful to control biological existence, hence biopower can be utilized to develop capitalism, and their bodies can be adjusted to machines. So, political strategies play crucial role in determining the life and death of the species (Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction Volume 1*, 1990). Amon denied the Jewish contribution to knowledge by declaring that that history never existed. His rejection of knowledge makes him not only an ignorant but failed tyrant. Oscar had this trait that he could utilize the human resources for his business. He never treated them as commodity or mere bodies. Later he utilized all his wealth to buy the people of his list he even acts a liberator when he buys Helen Hirsh the most expensive slave of Amon.

4.2.2 Sexuality and enslavement:

Power and sexuality are interrelated. Power makes a sexual victim as an object of excitement and target of control and use. Amon feels this excitement when after have a sexual experience with a blond girl in the film he being half naked started killing people with his shotgun through the apartment’s balcony. His enslavement of Helen Hirsh makes him appear as a confused psychologically disoriented man.

Amon doesn’t want to accept his fascination for a Jewish girl for various reasons. Foucault (1990) believes that the urge to keep one’s race purified had restrained control over sex. Amon didn’t want to impure his own self by accepting his fascination for an inferior person yet his natural urge to have her made Helen a poor victim in the hands of a psychotic beast. He beats her ruthlessly in the film, but this is not mentioned that elaborately in the novel. This aspect of using power against the weak and the benign makes him more disagreeable before the audience.

Deployment of power is directly connected to the bodies, but here both historical and biological factors combined to form a complex character in the form of Amon. The bodies and the physiologies are the intrinsic properties of the powerful. In this regard sex is a strategy of power relation and not ‘independent anchorage point’ (Foucault, 1990). Amon is unable to accept that sex is not nameless urge. It is madness or an access to identity and a value stronger than life and soul (ibid).

Desire for sex, its law and power can reveal its rights against domination. In saying yes to the urge of sex there is no denial but acceptance of power. Amon was not conscious of his submission of this power. In fact, he could not accept the fact that sparing people’s lives can make him more powerful. He saw himself in the mirror and found himself under the influence of the words of Schindler. He immediately denied this effect and went out in rage and killed the man he had earlier spared. These denials do not make him accept the facts.

4.2.3 Prison cells as the failed Panopticons:

Jeremy Bentham’s Panopticon is a building with a tower at the center from which it is possible to see each cell in which a prisoner or schoolboy is incarcerated. In that building visibility would be a trap. Each individual character is

seen but cannot communicate with the other prisoners. The prisoner can always see the tower but never knows from where he is being observed. It is also a laboratory of power, in which experiments are carried out on prisoners and staff (Shariden, 1977). The prisoner Krakow camps were a failed attempt to establish panopticons because there was no self-discipline, the convicts were not criminals to be disciplined instead they were kept there like animals. With the passage of time their living space was invaded and became more and more confined. The people were raided and massacred.

4.2.4 Similar or Different:

“Power is neither given nor exchanged, nor recovered but rather exercised”, “It is not primarily the maintenance of and reproduction of economic relations, but it is above all a relation of force (Foucault, 1977)”. The unspoken factors of power include social institution, economic inequalities, language, and bodies. Amon and Oscar present both these sides of power. Amon tried to rule over all these factors directly or indirectly by force over the bodies, whereas Oscar had only economic superiority and some links with social institutions which he had gained through his charismatic personality and with bribing where he could. On screen the audience could see how Oscar struggled to gain this power but Amon’s struggle to enter the powerful army is thoroughly missing.

5. Conclusion:

Since the novel and the film do not provide much insight into the thinking of Amon and he could only be understood through his actions recorded through history novel and film psychoanalysis was not possible. Hence the theory of Foucault gives understanding of the denial of and constraints over Amon’s sexual desire towards Helen Hirsh. His brutal exercise of power over the bodies and his authority to sentence people to death at any time makes a war criminal out of him. In this scenario Oscar Schindler comes out like a victorious savior. In the presence of the oppressor the worth of a liberator is truly acknowledged hence their relationship of foil to each other can be seen implicitly projected in the film.

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