

MAN AS RESCUER AND MONSTER IN STEVEN SPIELBERG'S FILM TEXT *SCHINDLER'S LIST*¹

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ABSTRACT. *This journal article addresses the confrontation between two extreme representations of man in Steven Spielberg's Schindler's List (1993): the rescuer and the monster. It is my contention that these representations simplify two of the moral options –good versus evil– from which men can freely choose according to both Judaism and Catholicism, which are the two religious cults the film alludes to. This article has a three-fold structure. The first part focuses on the godlike representation of Oskar Schindler² and his relation to key episodes in the Bible. The second one deals with Amon Goeth, Schindler's mirror image and the incarnation of evil in the film. The third part surveys Spielberg's blending of religious traditions in some films prior to Schindler's List. As a conclusion it is proposed that the godlike man who rescues his people is not only Oskar Schindler, but also Steven Spielberg.*

[Oskar Schindler to new workers:] "You'll be safe working here. If you work here, then you'll live through the war." [...] The promise had dazed them all. It was a godlike promise. How could a man make a promise like that? [...] And all the time she [Edith Liebgold] pondered Herr Schindler's promise. Only madmen made promises as absolute as that. Without blinking. Yet he wasn't mad. For he was a businessman with a dinner to go to. Therefore, he must *know*. But that meant some second sight, some profound contact with god or devil or the pattern of things. (Keneally 1993: 100-101)

1. This article is part of the research project "Análisis textual de los lenguajes de la literatura y del cine anglo-norteamericanos" (API07/A13), which is funded by the University of La Rioja.

2. When considering Oskar Schindler, I cannot help but thinking of our dear professor Carmelo Cunchillos, to whom this volume is dedicated. I got to know both of them, Cunchillos the man and Schindler the character, in the same year, 1994. My life has not been the same since then. I like to think that there are many of us whose lives have changed greatly for the better by having been on Carmelo's list. I thank him for that.

1. INTRODUCTION

Man as rescuer. Focusing on rescuers is nothing new in the film industry. Yet the focus on Holocaust rescuers that began with *Schindler's List* (Spielberg 1993) has recently drawn considerable attention from academics. In this regard Annette Insdorf (2003: 278) suggests that

The relatively recent focus on rescuers is no surprise. After previous Holocaust films that centered on Jewish victims and Nazi perpetrators, there had to be an audience surrogate beyond the oppressed survivor or the criminal – one with whom a viewer would indeed want to identify. [...] Given that motion pictures have always centered on “the hero” who enables “the happy end,” stories of Holocaust rescue proliferated in movie theaters and on television in the 1990s. They coincided with Eva Fogelman’s inspirational book, *Conscience and Courage: Rescuers of Jews during the Holocaust* (New York: Anchor Books, 1994), which recounts varied and complex stories of wartime decency.³

Eva Fogelman’s book on Holocaust rescuers appeared shortly after the release of Steven Spielberg’s *Schindler's List*. Her account begins with a reference to those who saved Jews during World War II, Oskar Schindler, the historical character, included. According to Fogelman (1995: 3), “In Hebrew these non-Jews are called *Haside U'Mot Ha'Olam* – ‘righteous among the nations of the world.’ They are rescuers”. There is no need to speculate here on the reasons that led those flesh-and-blood rescuers to put their own lives at risk, not even on Schindler’s reasons to do what he did. This article deals with Oskar Schindler as a character in Spielberg’s film and with the way in which he not only becomes a rescuer but also reaches the status of a god who is confronted in the film by a devil-like figure, Amon Goeth.

The binary opposition good/evil is constitutive of both Catholicism and Judaism. It is thus my contention that, in establishing a clear association between Schindler and the representation of good, on the one hand, and Goeth and the illustration of evil, on the other, Spielberg presents a simplified and, to some extent, reconciliatory view of religion, a sort of super-religion, which comprises elements from both Catholicism and Judaism.

3. Insdorf overlooks mentioning that before *Schindler's List*, the film, and before the rest of *Holocaust-rescue* films, there was Thomas Keneally’s book *Schindler's List* (1982). The film is a rather faithful adaptation of that former text, and Keneally’s work should not be completely disregarded when considering Steven Spielberg’s film translation. That is the main reason why I have chosen to begin this article by quoting several lines from Keneally’s earlier work. By doing so, I want to highlight that what Spielberg shows in the film had already been accounted for by Keneally in the novel. Spielberg changes the form, the *presentation*, as Schindler would have said, when he adapts the events to his movie-making methods. For a comparison between novel and film text, see Díaz Cuesta (1997).

The present analysis has a three-fold structure. Firstly I account for Schindler, his list, and his godlike representation in relation to well-known passages from the *Bible*. Then I focus on the confrontation between the two main characters in the film, Oskar Schindler and Amon Goeth. Lastly I trace Spielberg's simplification of religion in some of his previous films.

2. OSKAR SCHINDLER: MAN, RESCUER, GOD

Steven Spielberg's film *Schindler's List* is full of biblical references. Lists of descendants can be found in the first pages of the book of *Genesis* (which are also the first pages of the *Bible*). After the framing colour introduction, the opening sequence of Spielberg's film similarly provides lists of names that are spoken out by files of Jews gathered at Krakow rail station⁴ and although the lists that are spoken out at Krakow mean *death*, Schindler's list is the only one that will mean *life*.

A second reference to the book of *Genesis* is also present in the credit title sequence, with the successive dying out of candles, the last of which implies a complete absence of light at the beginning of Schindler's story (F1).



F1

This is a sort of reversal of the creation story in *Genesis* which will not be interrupted until Schindler's workers reach a safer place and are encouraged by Schindler himself to celebrate the Sabbath. With the exception of the child in red, it is not until that moment that we are permitted to see any colour image in the film.

To reinforce these Biblical parallelisms, the song that is heard at the opening of the film refers to the fact that the Sabbath was instituted to commemorate the creation of the world and the exodus of the Jews from Egypt as God's "chosen people".

Having considered the Biblical connotations of the word "list" and its relation to the religious world of the *Old Testament* – or *The Law and the Propbets*, if we

4. Such an opening is also reminiscent of the Scandinavian sagas, which used this technique as a means to preserve the memory of dead heroes.

use the Jewish term – , Steven Spielberg had other personal reasons to use this word in the title of his film instead of the original word – “Ark” – that was used in the title of the novel. Thomas Keneally (1998: xii) recalls that

Schindler's Ark was my preferred title for the book, even though the American publisher had resisted calling it that.⁵ [...] So I asked Spielberg if he would vindicate my first choice by calling his film *Ark*. He however insisted there were good cinematic reasons to call it *List*. He wanted to begin with images of lists, to continue with lists as image and device throughout the film, and in a sense to end with them – that great procession of the Schindler survivors which concludes the film.

Simon Louvish (1994: 14) has argued that Keneally’s “book was published as *Schindler's List* in America, presumably because the mass audience was not expected to know the word Ark”. I cannot but disagree with Louvish’s explanation since only one year before the publication of the book, Steven Spielberg had directed and released in America a very popular film, *Raiders of the Lost Ark* (1981), with not only the word “ark” in its title but also with an ark, the Ark of the Covenant, as the main object of the protagonists’ quest. A much more feasible reason to change the original title in America, however, may have been the actual nature of the ark itself. Schindler’s “ark” does not have the religious, symbolic, even mythical connotations the Ark of the Covenant is traditionally associated with, which is why maintaining the original title might have misled audiences as to the real quality of both book and film.

A second very important argument in favour of choosing “list” instead of “ark” for the title of both book and especially film has to do with the relationship the film establishes between Schindler and Noah, the Biblical figure appointed by God to select couples of living creatures and place them in his ark before the deluge in order for them to be saved from extinction. Schindler, like Noah before him, chooses Jewish couples – and whole families – to be saved from Nazi extermination. Thus an explicit association in the title between Noah’s and Schindler’s ark would have been utterly unfortunate since Noah’s ark was herded up mainly with animals, a condition the Nazis saw in and attributed to the Jews during the war. In choosing the word “list” as opposed to “ark”, the film retakes only the positive element to be found in the parallelism between Schindler’s and Noah’s ark: the biblical idea of a myriad of people descending from a single father, Abraham – Schindler in this case. Thus at the end of the film we note that

5. In America the book was sold as *Schindler's List* from the very moment of its publication.

there are currently six thousand descendants of the people in the list, who are opposed to the six million people that were killed by the Nazis.

The story of Schindler and his Jews moving from one place to another – from the ghetto to Goeth's camp and from there to Schindler's own camp in his hometown – also reflects the Biblical story of Moses as told in the second book of the *Bible*, *Exodus*. This connection is made explicit in the film by Goeth. When Schindler tells him "I want my people", Goeth's answer is "Who are you, Moses?". In the film, however, there will be no manna from heaven but rather from Schindler's own supplies, which will become heaven on earth for these workers, who will have Schindler instead of – or as – their own god to feed them.

Insisting on the religious references that are to be found in the film, it can be argued that Schindler could also be paired with any of the Old Testament prophets in that he foresaw what was going to come after the war. Yet the Biblical figure he more closely resembles to is no other than Jesus Christ himself, just another one of the many Biblical prophets to the layman, but the Son of God, or God Himself, for Catholic believers. The main parallelism between both figures, Schindler and Christ, derives from their being saviours. According to the Christian faith, the people who follow Christ will be saved after death; similarly, the people who followed, or rather, were chosen by Schindler were actually saved from an anticipated death. Just as Christ did when he chose his apostles, one of the first things Schindler does to accomplish his *mission* is to look for a collaborator, a disciple, so to speak, whom he finds in Itzhak Stern.

Throughout the film there are many other instances that suggest this Christ-like characterisation of Schindler. His first public appearance is reminiscent of Christ's in that nobody recognises him. Both of them bring more wine to the places where they are socially introduced: Christ in a miraculous manner at the wedding at Cana, Schindler making use of his money at the restaurant. The mysterious way in which Schindler is presented, with crosses in the background, together with the bright light above his head (F2), and with the cross – formed by the window frame – through which he can be seen from the point of view of the maitre (F3), make us think of at least a saint-like figure, in spite of his wearing the swastika.



F2



F3

The shape of a Christian cross can also be seen in the sequence of the first meeting between Schindler and Stern, the accountant wearing the compulsory bracelet with the Star of David, the tycoon wearing the expensive pin with the swastika on his sleeve. It is the big cross of the huge window that shelters both of them (F4).



F4



F5

Even more overt are the two crosses that surround Schindler when a one-handed man thanks him for his generosity with a “God bless you; you’re a good man” (F5). According to Joseph McBride (1997: 438), “It is when Schindler unexpectedly begins seeing his Jewish workers as individuals that he begins to change his thinking about the war. The first such incident is that of the elderly one-armed machinist, Lowenstein (Henryk Bista)”.

McBride (440) also sees Schindler’s assumption of God’s power to condemn in at least one of Schindler’s decisions, which is simply a synecdoche for the whole selection process of his chosen people:

When Schindler ransoms his women from Auschwitz, the camp commandant tries to interest him instead in “three hundred units” of Hungarian Jews from another train; in rejecting those Jews in favor of *his* Jews, Schindler is playing God and condemning the others to death.

Schindler also looks for shelter in a Catholic church for two very different purposes: it is in a church that he begins his dealings with the Jewish black market and a church is the place in which he is reconciled with his wife. In the former case, Schindler acts very much like the merchants that Christ drove from the temple, according to the gospel of St John. In the latter, however, Schindler has completed a process of atonement which allows him to go back to the temple in order to befriend his sister-like wife before continuing with his life-saving enterprise.

Last but not least is the final speech in the factory. According to Bryan Cheyette (1997: 237), “By the end of the film, Schindler, in response to Goeth, is unequivocally deified (even to the extent of giving a final crypto-sermon on the

mount in Brinnlitz)". Michael André Bernstein (1994: 430) relates this moment to Hollywood religious films when he refers to

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*).

These identifications of Schindler with Christ are complemented with further visual parallelisms between Schindler and God the Father. In many instances in the film, Schindler's eyes – or rather his *eye* – illustrate this point. On many occasions in fact only one of them is highlighted. In a film as full of religious references as this is, it has to be taken into account that the traditional way of representing God the Father is by means of a single, everwatching eye. Paradoxically the hard and metallic brightness of Schindler's eye makes the viewer aware of the ambiguity of this character (for example in F6).



F6

Annette Insdorf (2003: 261) argues in this respect that

Cinematically speaking, the director establishes that his hero reveals little, especially about his motivations. [...] The ambiguity of the character is expressed by the lighting. [...] To see half his face in shadow –at least until he makes a decisive choice– externalizes his possibly dual motive of profiteering and protecting.

Spielberg's vision of Schindler as a sort of god seems to coincide with what some of Schindler's Jews thought of their saviour when they started to believe that there was some possibility of hope. Stella Müller-Madej (1997: 223) was the first person from the list to compile her memories of those days in a book:

The New Year is coming, and the women have made Schindler an incredibly beautiful steel floral bouquet from the strips of metal left over from milling cartridge casings. I think that even the most devout Jews must pray to Schindler now, and not to God.

Another Holocaust survivor also tried to draw the line between the mortal man and the hero when he was interviewed by Elinor Brecher (1994: xxxvii):

Whatever he [Schindler] was between 1939 and 1945, he has come to represent so much more than a mere flesh-and-blood mortal. He has become, in legend, what most people want to believe they themselves would become in situations of moral extremis. “Each of us at any time, faced with the particular circumstances, has the power to stand on the side of right,” a California survivor named Leon Leyson told me. “Ninety-nine percent of the time, we simply don’t. This is an ordinary man, not a special hero with super powers, and yet he did it.”

Another list survivor, Rena Finder, reinforces this point in the documentary accompanying the DVD version of *Schindler’s List* (Mayhew 2004) when she affirms that “He was life. He was maybe future. He was God for us” (F7).



F7

By representing Schindler as a sort of god, Spielberg has been truthful to the testimonies of those survivors. David M. Crowe (2007: 1) summarizes those testimonies at the beginning of his comprehensive biography of Oskar Schindler recalling that, during the war, “to many *Schindlerjuden*, he was already a god-like figure”. By visually depicting Schindler as a god, rather than exaggerating the facts, Spielberg seems to have got closer to the historical truth about this mysterious member of the Nazi Party.

3. AMON GOETH: MAN, MONSTER, (D)EVIL

So far we have mainly referred to Schindler, his list and his story, but the story of Schindler, as it is told by Spielberg and recalled by many of the *Schindlerjuden*, is incomplete without taking into consideration the demonic figure of Amon Goeth. Schindler and Goeth, Goeth and Schindler, two men whose portraits could be easily seen as the two different sides of the same coin since, as I show below, the differences between good and evil are sometimes narrower than might be expected.

Philip Gourevitch (1994: 50) appositely notes the mystery hidden behind both figures: "Schindler's decency is presented as a kind of enigmatic equivalent of Goeth's barbarity. The one protects Jews, the other likes to start his day by sniping at them from the porch of his villa. Both forms of behaviour are unfathomable mysteries".

Nigel Morris (2007: 226) has recently paid attention to the moment when Goeth takes a rest while sniping:

It [this scene] also resonates with Terrence Malick's *Badlands* (1973) when Goeth places the rifle behind his neck, crucifix-style. This image releases the partial identification, by stressing the film's textuality and relating Goeth to familiar cinematic psychopaths, and ironises the Nazi's self-image as a superior Christian culture, a point overlooked by critics who complain that Schindler's blessing and prayer at the Armistice represent containment of Judaism by a Messianic saviour (Horowitz 1997: 125). *Schindler's List* does *not* trade in Manichean certainties.

Furthermore we must not forget that the devil has traditionally been envisaged as an imitator of God, mocking His actions. The film does not always follow this rule exactly: some times it is Goeth who acts first, forcing Schindler to *repeat* his actions while opposing them. I am referring for example to Goeth's welcoming speech when he says that "Today is History" and that those six hundred years of Jewish presence "never happened", which will be subverted by Schindler's equally welcoming speech to his own camp of saved Jews in Brinnlitz.

Some other times Goeth mimicks Schindler's actions. This is the case of possibly the most astounding *repeated* sequence: the interrogatory to Helen Hirsch performed by each of the two men. Although shot alike and located in the same space, the two scenes present two situations which serve to widen the differences between both characters even more. As Sara R. Horowitz (1997: 131) puts it,

The films posits two contesting models of manhood –Schindler and Goeth. The film asks, What is a real man– the sadist or the savior? [...] The contrast between Goeth and Schindler is brought out by the scene each shares with Helen Hirsch in the cellar at Paszów.

On the one hand, Schindler's mock interrogatory prepares both the viewer and Helen Hirsch for Goeth's real interrogatory and torture. Schindler's performance includes all the elements we are used to in *film noir* interrogatories, especially the setting, with the housekeeper sitting on a wooden chair and a bulb above her head. Its very strangeness in a film such as *Schindler's List* adds to the episode an extra strength (F8). The scene ends with Hirsch standing up and being kissed by

Schindler. On the other hand, Goeth's interrogatory is a monologue full of questions which are either rhetorical or answered by himself. His Shylock-like speech⁶ serves to show an inner side of Goeth which had already been hinted at by Schindler in his previous interrogatory: Goeth's affectionate love for the housekeeper. Even the setting, although the scene is shot in the same place, takes a very different turn, with Hirsch standing up and being circled by Goeth (F9) until he starts beating her, precisely when it looked as if he were going to do what Schindler had done before him: kiss her. This repetition of sequences with a difference coincides with Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan's words about the analogy between characters: "When two characters are presented in similar circumstances, the similarity or contrast between their behaviour emphasizes traits characteristic of both" (Rimmon-Kenan 1983: 70).



F8



F9

Among those traits which both Schindler and Goeth share is their passion for women. However, even in this respect both characters undergo a completely different evolution. In that first glossy sequence at the restaurant, Schindler pays some attention to the women sitting opposite him. They stare back at him while he concentrates on the Nazi officer, who is accompanied by another woman who will eventually feel Schindler's seductive power. Goeth's first woman is Helen Hirsch, whom he chooses because of her lack of experience, her virginity as a maid, as it were. In their first encounter, Goeth shows some sort of respect towards the woman by not getting too close to her, so that, he says, he does not give her his cold. Immediately afterwards, Hirsch is witness to the assassination of another woman whom Goeth has ordered to shoot. The woman is a civil engineer who states that the building they are constructing must be rebuilt. They will follow her instructions but only after killing her: Goeth does not want a

6. Goeth literally quotes William Shakespeare's Shylock in *The Merchant of Venice*: "Hath not a Jew eyes?". Shylock's appealing speech is given to claim his right to take revenge. Goeth's attempts to justify his lust for Hirsch and, more interestingly, allows the viewer to see him as someone more human than what his actions indicate, someone who, for a short moment, tries to put himself in the place of the Jews, and someone who is closer to Schindler in his attitude towards women, at least in this speech.

Jewish woman to question his authority. Hirsch soon realises that being a woman will not be enough to please him.

Later on both men perform an extensive act of kissing. Schindler starts kissing women to celebrate his birthday; his kissing a Jewish girl will paradoxically lead him to imprisonment and, eventually, *rescue* by Goeth. Goeth's excuse for kissing is the New Year: he wants to kiss all the women at the party, an occasion which will be used by Schindler to try to change the officer's implacable attitude to a more forgiving one. This momentary imperial mood of Goeth's is visually reinforced in the film by his wearing white clothes and his riding a white horse (F10). The use of light-coloured clothes is typically associated with Schindler throughout the film (for example in F11), which means that momentarily at least Goeth parallels Schindler. Despite all those similarities, the eventual disposition of both characters towards women is completely different: Goeth ends up beating Helen Hirsch and Schindler returns to his wife in those two sequences already mentioned.



F10



F11

In spite of his having been presented as attractive by some analysts of *Schindler's List*, the character of Amon Goeth is rather flat from the start. Perhaps his lack of motivation for his evil actions makes him more of a mystery. According to Lester D. Friedman (2006: 318), "Yet another problematic critique focuses on the evil of Amon Goeth. While Spielberg offers at least a few clues about Oskar's evolution, Goeth remains a motiveless malignancy throughout the movie". Bernstein (1994: 429) argues that "For long stretches, the film's energy derives chiefly from the battle between Oskar Schindler and Amon Goeth. [...] The stakes of the contest are, of course, the lives of 'their' Jews". This statement seems particularly apt when applied to the bargaining sequence, where the nature of the *game* both men play acquires anti-Faustian proportions, since what Oskar is implicitly trying to do is to convince the *devil* to let some people be saved.

The scope of their confrontation is a very ordinary one. Schindler and Goeth are the two halves of a single character with a double self, a kind of Jekyll-Hyde

figure. But they can also be seen as two brothers who continuously remind each other of their opposed, if complementary, personalities.

Bruno Bettelheim (1991: 91) argues that stories telling about the evolution of two brothers have been with us for hundreds of years: “The motif of the two brothers is central to the oldest fairy tale [...]. In over three thousand years since then it has taken on many forms”. As happens in *Schindler’s List*, “In all variations of this tale, the two figures symbolize opposite aspects of our nature, impelling us to act in contrary ways” (Bettelheim 1991: 91).

This ambiguity of character⁷ reaches its peak in the shaving sequence, in which, if we are not watching attentively, it is easy to confuse one with the other, although Schindler’s face is overexposed and Goeth’s underexposed (F12 and F13). This sequence seems to follow Bettelheim’s stance that “By juxtaposing what happens between the good and the evil brother [...] the story implies that if the contradictory aspects of the personality remain separated from each other, nothing but misery is the consequence: even the good brother is defeated by life” (96).



F12



F13

Later on, in that mirror-like sequence where both sit at a low table, the only line that separates them is a disturbing shadow (F14) which stands in the place of the cross that appeared in the first meeting with Stern (F4), a sequence which this latter one very much resembles.



F14



F5

7. “Spielberg was fascinated by Oskar’s ambiguity, and sought to render it in the film”, says Thomas Keneally (1998: xiii). Goeth’s characterization contributes to increase Schindler’s mystery.

Goeth's characterization contributes to the development of Schindler's personality. According to Bettelheim (95),

Whatever the details, in the stories of the "Two Brothers" type there comes the moment when the brothers differentiate from each other, as every child has to move out of the undifferentiated stage. What happens then symbolizes as much the inner conflict within us – represented by the different actions of the two brothers – as the necessity to give up one form of existence to achieve a higher one.

Eventually, Schindler will achieve that higher form of existence Bettelheim refers to. Although this is achieved at the cost of Goeth, who remains a flat character from the beginning to the end of the film, as mentioned above, and who always fails in his few attempts to do some kind of good.

In the end the tale of these particular *brothers* can be regarded as a reflection of that former story of death and hatred between Cain and Abel. In this case the evil in Goeth would have sinned against the good in Schindler by killing *his* people.

4. STEVEN SPIELBERG: MAN, DIRECTOR, PIOUS

According to the innumerable interviews⁸ in which Spielberg has explained how the direction of this film came to be associated with his rediscovery of Jewish traditions, anyone could think *Schindler's List* a three-hour tale of Jewishness. The film's imagery is not only full of Messianic references but also of Catholic references. Together with all the instances of sequences which refer to either of these traditions there is the final speech, in which, at the same time as Schindler crosses himself, one of the Jews sings a Jewish song in Hebrew. By this blending of two religions in one single idea of goodness Spielberg manages to reconcile both traditions. Voices have been heard against this blending, as Morris (2007: 231) explains:

Religious Jews have resented Schindler, as hostilities end, making the sign of the cross over those he has saved. This allegedly asserts, insultingly, that Christian superiority has redeemed them spiritually as well as physically (Horowitz 1997: 132). Considerable mental gymnastics are required to substantiate this.

8. For a comprehensive view of any thing that had to do with the production of the film see Thomas Fensch's splendid compilation of articles and interviews on these topics: *Oskar Schindler and his List: The Man, the Book, the Film, the Holocaust and Its Survivors* (1995).

Criticism coming from analysts who study *Schindler's List* without considering this film along with the rest of the director's films tends to overlook the fact that this simplified use of religion is not something new in Spielberg's career,⁹ which began in 1971 with *Duel*. In his first film we already found evil *incarnate* in the shape of a lorry.¹⁰ The extraterrestrials of *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* (1977) were wrapped in mystical paper (Insdorf 2003: 266), although they were not assigned any specific religion. The Indiana Jones saga (Spielberg 1981, 1984 and 1989a) continued that approximation to religion from its most fantastic side, which ended up with the resolution of the eventual difficulties in each story thanks to an act of faith. *The Color Purple* (1985) translates Alice Walker's novel (1982) of the same title, which consists of a series of letters that Celie, the protagonist, addresses to her own idea of God. In *Empire of the Sun* (1987) Jim, for a fraction of a second, brings back to life a person that has just died and he will try to do the same with his oriental friend, in yet another blending, another reconciliation, of two traditions, two cultures. *Always* (1989b) is the film with more obvious supernatural connotations, since it has a ghost figure as main character. But the film which gets closer to the religious idea shown by Spielberg in *Schindler's List* is undoubtedly *E.T., the Extra-Terrestrial* (1982), as Annette Insdorf (2003: 266) points out. In *E.T.* we find, among other similarities, a creature from another planet and his *brother on Earth* being raised from the dead in the same miraculous manner as Schindler's Jews are saved from a horrible death in Auschwitz. In this parallelism, Sara R. Horowitz (1997: 125) observes one of the various traits that, according to her own interpretation, make of this film a Christian tale:

Instead, the film turns out to be about Christianity, transforming Schindler into a prodigal son and ultimately into one of the Christ-like saviors that populate Spielberg's films. *E.T.*, for example, is replete with Christological references. The alien humanoid who proves himself more-than-human comes to earth from a "home" beyond the skies (heaven) to redeem humans from a bleak, valueless life devoid of loving connections because humans cannot save themselves. Similarly Schindler, whose face is backlit, illuminated, or framed with a halo, and who looks on his Jews from above, rescues the powerless, death-bound Jews. Schindler saves "his" Jews – whom he calls "my people" – physically and redeems them spiritually.

9. For a survey of Spielberg's career as a filmmaker up to the release of *Schindler's List* see, for example, Baxter (1996) and McBride (1997).

10. The title of the film in Spain, *El diablo sobre ruedas*, makes this connection much more explicit.

As we have seen, Schindler's representation is not only reminiscent of Christ, but also of the Jewish God of the *Bible*: which means that there is much more blending than imposition in *Schindler's List*. Although Spielberg (in Palowski 1998: 171) has stated that in his own mind he cannot "make the comparison between *E.T.* and *Schindler's List*", the similarities are still there and his religious blending may be partly due to his childhood experience as a Jewish boy in a Christian neighbourhood. John H. Richardson (2000: 159-160) quotes Spielberg's recollection of his wish for Christmas lights:

I kept wanting to have Christmas lights on the front of our house so it didn't look like the Black Hole of Calcutta in an all-Gentile neighborhood – our neighborhood used to win awards for Christmas decorations. I would beg my father, 'Dad, please, let us have some lights,' and he'd say, 'No, we're Jewish,' and I'd say, 'What about taking that white porch light out and screwing in a red porch light?' and he'd say, 'No!' and I'd say, 'What about a yellow porch light?' and he said, 'No!'

Going back to *Schindler's List*, Judith E. Doneson (1997: 149-150) wonders about the presence of Christian crosses at the end of the film:

And the cross on Schindler's grave combined with all the crosses in the Christian cemetery? Perhaps an insinuation that the memory of Jewish destruction should serve to remind Israel that a more Christian attitude toward its neighbors ought to be forth-coming.

Doneson (149) thinks that this scene, with the Christian crosses and the superimposed title "In memory of the more than six million Jews murdered", "lends emphasis to the notion that Jewish survival depends upon Christian benevolence". I rather think that the emphasis is on the idea of living together, on a respectful coexistence of religions and cultures.

Spielberg's interpretation of religion in all the above mentioned films, *Schindler's List* included, is a rather simple one and it is a matter of lesser importance whether you are a Jew, a Catholic, or a believer in any other god, as long as you are *good*. In this sense we could define the faith that is displayed throughout these films as a sort of super-religion – conversely, another possible definition might be infra-religion – which has traits common to various, more elaborate, beliefs.

5. CONCLUSION: SPIELBERG TO THE RESCUE

In the beginning there was the Sight. The only remnants of the camera's errant wandering are the last traces it has stamped on our minds. It wanders

through streets full of corpses, black blood, hidden children, close-ups of the proximity of unknown people, until it pans in that wide shot (F15) that accompanies the red stain (F16) that wants to spring from the screen while we share the viewpoint of a deified Schindler. “Schindler observes from a safe Godlike perspective – virtually the film spectator’s, in psychoanalytic accounts – from which he can see everything but remain untouched, yet emotionally involved”, says Morris (2007: 235). From that peak, from his own stature, and from the height given to him by his horse (F17), his money and his contacts, from that hill, this god in white descends and chooses his people. Chosen among chosen people, the Jews of the list are introduced in the same apparently random manner in which the monstrous Amon Goeth will practise his sniping skills. Oskar Schindler is presented to us as someone who has possessions and wishes more, an empty life he tries to remedy buying his own people. “They’re mine”, he says, and god’s word falls on a Nazi officer.

Both in real life and in the film, Spielberg shares Schindler’s divine condition and the power that is gained through clemency. Perhaps that is one of the reasons why the director filmed the story of the Nazi member: to show the gratitude of Jewish people to those who in one way or another helped them, but also to tell the people afflicted in their seats that we are the chosen people because we can go and see his film and go out of the cinema without fearing being shot by someone from a balcony. For those who did not understand this simple reason included in *Schindler’s List*, Spielberg would make *Munich* in 2005.



F15



F16



F17

Creators are sometimes referred to as gods. In the case of Spielberg this is even clearer, since he is known as such, as *god*, among his subordinates. And not only among them. Stephen Schiff (2000: 171) recalls his meeting Spielberg at the Consumer Electronic Show in Las Vegas in 1994 in the following terms:

As he [Steven Spielberg] played with a video game that traced the berserk journey of a runaway truck on a sere and distant planet, I overheard a pimply young techie murmur, "Look, it's God." His companion craned his neck, caught sight of Spielberg. "Hey, you're right," he said. "God."

Spielberg, the god, the rescuer, aims at what can still be done in so many places around the world. While shooting the film, Spielberg told Thomas Keneally (1998: xiii) "I know you would have liked to see it made earlier, but this was the right time to make it". "He gave a number of reasons", adds Keneally (xiii), "but one of the chief ones was that this was the first time since World War II that the barbarous term "ethnic cleansing" was in play again, this time in the Balkans". In an interview given to Susan Royal (2007), Spielberg admits that "I made it [*Schindler's List*] this year because I was so upset about what was happening in Bosnia, as well as about the attempted genocide of the whole Kurdish population".

Spielberg has often said, and critics have recognised, that he privileges the viewer's experience and wants each viewer to become the eventual director of his films. It is as if he wanted to be one with the viewer, like Schindler, according to Crowe (2007: 626), was one with *his* Jews:

By the end of the war, Oskar became so close to his Jewish workers that it became difficult for outsiders, particularly in Germany, to separate Oskar from his Schindler Jews. In some ways, his efforts to help Jews during the war created a unique symbiosis between himself and his Jewish workers, and in many ways they became one.

By making this film Spielberg the man was rescuing memory, rescuing himself and rescuing us. If the Ten Commandments can be summed up in two, Spielberg's *List* can be reduced to just two words, the same words E.T. says to a child, Gertie (Drew Barrymore), at the end of the film *E.T.*: "Be good".

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