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Trauma Representation in Styron's *Sophie's Choice* and Its Adaptation by Pakula

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1 Introduction

Exactly seventy years ago, one of the most horrific events in history came to an end: the Holocaust. That is, the genocide itself was put to a stop. Its after-effects, on the other hand, were to endure much longer – today still, its consequences are to be felt. The impact of the event will, therefore, be discussed in this thesis.

As I will explain, its influence can be perceived in multiple domains. Firstly, the events of the Holocaust have provoked a renewed interest in the concept of trauma. This interest is twofold. First of all, it has called attention to trauma in its original field of study, psychology. The history and developments of trauma within psychology will accordingly be dealt with in chapter 1.

Yet, the interest in trauma has also risen outside its domain of origin. As James Berger has stated, trauma has become “a pivotal subject connecting [...] many disciplines” (569). Hence, contemporary theorists have directed their attention to the intersection between trauma and several cultural disciplines, of which history and literature have been the most important ones. Some of the most important scholars, like Dori Laub, Shoshana Felman, Dominick LaCapra, Cathy Caruth and Marianne Hirsch, will, therefore, be discussed in chapter 3.

Secondly, the events of the Holocaust have provoked the emergence of an artistic tradition. Approaching the horror of the Holocaust through the means of art can be valuable in many ways. Not only can it help people understand the events better, it can also help them to cope with them better. Moreover, the artistic representation of the Holocaust can attribute to its remembrance. Furthermore, many Holocaust representations are created by survivors of the traumatic event. By addressing the event artistically, they may work on the processing of their own trauma.

Unfortunately, not everyone believed – or today even believes – in the advantages of artistic creations on the topic of the Holocaust. Many people support(ed) Theodor Adorno’s claim that ‘to write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric’ (Adorno and Tiedemann, xv). Although Adorno himself later expounded on his point of view, his statement has had a major influence. In chapter 4, the resulting demand of fidelity towards Holocaust representations will hence be discussed. I will, thereby, focus on the different negative reactions towards Holocaust representation (4.1), as well as the reasons that inspire these opinions (4.2). In paragraph 4.3, I will, however, explain that traumatic experiences, like the Holocaust, should be encountered differently from other historical events.

In chapter 5, then, I will deal with the two artistic domains which are most important for

this thesis: literature and film. First, I will look at trauma literature and cinema in general, focusing on their shared advantages in representing trauma (5.1) as well as the specific qualities for both media separately (5.2). Secondly, I will pay attention to one type of trauma literature and film in specific. In paragraph 5.3, I will therefore discuss certain recurring elements of form as well as content in Holocaust literature and film.

To conclude my theoretical framework, I will turn to another fidelity debate. This time, the debate has nothing to do with a novel's/film's loyalty towards the historical events portrayed, but with the loyalty of a filmic adaptation to its source novel. As Barbara Tapa Lupack claims, "adaptation has always had more than its share of detractors" (5). The most common prejudices towards adaptations and their origins will be discussed in paragraph 6.1. However, as I will explain, these prejudices have started to change in recent decades, due to theoretical (6.2.1) and practical (6.2.2) changes. It is pertinent to consider these insights, as *Sophie's Choice*, the subject of my analysis, is both a novel by William Styron and a film – the novel's adaptation – by Alan J. Pakula.

In chapter 7, then, the actual analysis of *Sophie's Choice* starts. In the analysis, I will focus on the ways in which trauma is represented in book and film. Through the comparison between both media, I would like to identify the differences between the ways in which both represent trauma. To do this, I will consider form as well as content, thereby also focusing on the different techniques used in both media. If, then, there are differences, I will try to explain why this is the case.

In short, this thesis will investigate the ways in which trauma is represented in William Styron's novel, *Sophie's Choice*, as well as in its film adaptation by Alan J. Pakula. I will, thereby, point out the differences between the representations by both media, as well as attempt to explain the reasons for these distinctions. Therefore, I will rely on the theoretical issues explained in the first part of this thesis, in order to help understand how trauma theory can be applied to novel and film.

2 The History of Trauma Theory

2.1 Origins

Trauma studies, as we know them today, have originated in the late nineteenth century. Originally, the term ‘trauma’ referred to a physical phenomenon, and more specifically to “a violent disruption of the body’s integrity” (J. Hirsch, 8). It is only in the nineteenth century that the concept of ‘trauma’ was first linked to mental illnesses, by the French neurologist Jean Martin Charcot (Ringel, 1). More precisely, Charcot investigated the connection between trauma and hysteria, a disorder commonly diagnosed in women. And indeed, he discovered that hysterical symptoms were not physiological, but psychological in nature, describing hysterical attacks in terms of dissociative problems.

According to Ringel, Charcot, amongst others, has had an influence on two men who have become known as two major figures in psychoanalysis today: Pierre Janet and Sigmund Freud (1). Joshua Hirsch claims that it is because of them that trauma is now primarily linked to psychological phenomena. The term can in this case be defined as “an experience that overwhelm[s] a person’s normal means of mentally processing stimuli. The unprocessed memory of the experience remain[s] embedded in the mind, resulting in pathologies of memory, emotion, and practical functioning” (8). This altered state of consciousness provoked by traumatic memories has been termed “dissociation” by Janet, some insights of whom will be discussed in the following paragraph.

2.1.1 Pierre Janet

Janet, a student of Charcot (Ringel, 2), believed that a person could overcome his/her hysterical symptoms by putting his/her traumatic memories into words, in this way reconstructing his/her past. He argued that therein lies the essential difference between posttraumatic memories and narrative memories, namely in the way in which they can be mastered (J. Hirsch, 21). Narrative memories can actually be narrated, i.e. recounted. This means that a person is able to call certain memories to mind and this at a chosen moment in time. Moreover, s/he can insert them into proper chronology. On top of that, his or her point of view on the memory can change, depending on the context. Posttraumatic experiences, on the other hand, come to the surface uninvited and unexpectedly or, inversely, remain inaccessible. The former phenomenon is called hypermnesia, while the latter is known as amnesia (22). Moreover, they are not chronological or linear, but fragmented and unmanageable. These memories are not stored in our brain the same way as normal – narrative – memories. As J. Hirsch explains, “Posttraumatic memory maintains the fixed and inflexible point of view of the

witness” (22). These memories, thus, remain in our head as literal recordings of a past traumatic event. Joshua Hirsch summarizes the difference between both memories, describing it as follows:

In normal memory, the “I” that remembers in the present is different from the “I” that experienced the event in the past. The point of view has changed. In posttraumatic memory, on the other hand, the present “I” is invaded by the memory of the past “I”. The point of view remains that of the witness (22).

2.1.2 Sigmund Freud

Sigmund Freud, like Charcot and Janet, initially believed that hysterical attacks were provoked by memories of exogenous trauma. Exogenous trauma, as opposed to endogenous trauma, is trauma caused by external events. Endogenous trauma, then, is trauma caused by internal, psychic events like fantasies and instinctual excitations (Hirsch, 8). Freud added that trauma is not caused by fear (Furcht) of something known or anxiety (Angst) of something unknown. It is, on the other hand, caused by fright (Schreck), “the shock of something unexpected that suddenly attacks the ego [– the psychic apparatus –] from outside the body, piercing or rupturing the skin, and produces the excess of affect commonly referred to as panic” (De Lauretis, 5).

2.1.2.1 The Seduction Theory

In focusing on the exogenous type of trauma, Freud introduced his term of ‘Nachträglichkeit’, i.e. deferred action. He thereby meant that “the trauma must be understood in relation to the subject’s belated and repeated restructurings of the memory of the event as time passes and circumstances change” (Rauch in Joshua Hirsch, 10). In other words, people suffering from hysterical attacks have experienced a certain event in their life. This event, however, only receives its traumatic content when it is reinterpreted after another experience, later on in life, which reminds them of the earlier one. The most important example of an external event causing trauma is sexual abuse. Because of this, Freud’s first model is called the ‘seduction theory’ (Ringel, 2; Hirsch, 8).

2.1.2.2 The Conflict Theory

Later on, Freud, however, renounced the seduction theory and developed the ‘conflict theory’. This theory is based on his conception of the human drives. A drive is, following De Lauretis, “felt in the body as a continuous pressure, an urge, impulse or tension driving one towards a particular object that alone can relieve the pressure and temporarily provide satisfaction” (21). Freud here emphasizes the sexual drive as the main one steering people’s

behavior. This in Freud's view, corresponds to the pleasure principle, meaning that people's unconscious mental processes – their psychic apparatus or ego – “strive towards gaining pleasure” while “from any operation which might arouse unpleasantness (‘pain’) mental activity draws back (repression)”(Freud, 14). The difference with the seduction theory, thus, resides in the fact that Freud's attention has shifted from exogenous to endogenous trauma, as he focuses now on internal processes, like for instance dreams and wishes. It is only there that people can express their unconscious desires, led by their drives, which can impossibly be outed in society.

However, Freud's conflict theory has proven unsatisfactory in many cases of traumatic suffering. For in the twentieth century, many events took place which could not be interpreted as instances of the pleasure principle. Therefore, a new kind of drive was introduced by Freud: ‘the death drive’. This will be explained in more detail in the following paragraph.

2.1.2.3 The Death Drive

It was in 1919, when he was confronted with the behavior of surviving soldiers of the First World War, that Freud felt that his previous theory was no longer tenable. These soldiers were in fact suffering from traumatic memories which could in no case be explained by the pleasure principle, as they did not draw back from pain or strive towards pleasure. On the contrary; their memories caused an intolerable kind of suffering. Therefore, Freud introduced the concept of the death drive in his 1920's text *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*. The death drive can be defined as “the presence in the human organism of a force driving the apparatus to lower excitation beyond the pleasure threshold to a zero level of energy or the total absence of tension characteristic of inorganic matter” (De Lauretis, 8). In other words, in each human being a force is active, though unconscious, which strives towards self-destruction. The death drive can, thus, account for the compulsion to repeat painful, even unbearable experiences, like for instance those originating from the war.

2.2 Contemporary Insights

It is not surprising that the previous century, with all of its atrocities, has been of capital importance for the development of traumatic diagnoses and their treatments. One of the main events which has raised the interest in the subject of trauma theory has been the Holocaust. Together with the First World War, the Vietnam War and the modern women's movement, the Second World War, during which this genocide took place, has returned exogenous trauma to the center of the psychiatric establishment (Hirsch, 8; Ringel, 5; Berger 572). Hirsch, for instance emphasizes that the Holocaust is an event which goes even beyond Freud's concept of

fright (13). Not only did the victims not know what was going to happen to them during ‘the Final Solution’, i.e. their deportation to death and/or labor camps, these events were also literally inconceivable. They did, in fact, not “fit any imagined possible reality” (J. Hirsch, 13).

However, even though trauma theory, thus, became a major subject of interest after the Second World War, moving trauma from the private to the public domain, it is only after the Vietnam War that Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) was included in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (of mental disorders) (DSM) (Gibbs, 3; Ringel, 5). The diagnosis, however, does not address childhood antecedents in trauma patients, which might have had an impact on a person’s life as well. Therefore, another diagnosis was included under the name of Complex Traumatic Stress Disorder, which focuses on trauma resulting from “exposure to severe stressors that (1) are repetitive or prolonged, (2) involve harm or abandonment by caregivers or other ostensibly responsible adults, and (3) occur at developmentally vulnerable times in the victim’s life, such as early childhood or adolescence” (Ford and Courtois, 13). On top of that, Developmental Trauma Disorder has been included, focusing on “children with complex developmental trauma histories” (Ringel, 6). It is thus clear that, as Hirsch confirms, traumatic disorders have become a major focus in the area of psychiatry over the past few years (Ringel, 8).

This evolution can also be explained by the increased incidence of traumatic stress in recent years. Think for instance of the twenty-first century in the United States, with the mass trauma of 9/11, the war on terrorism and not to forget the ongoing wars against Iraq and Afghanistan (Gibbs, 2; Ringel, 7). Research has, however, proven that expressing one’s trauma immediately after the traumatic event is not always the best way of coping. Early intervention appears, thus, not always necessary (Ringel, 7). As a result, trauma intervention methods are nowadays less intrusive and more based on stabilization and psychosocial approaches (Basham & Miehl; Briere & Scott; Ford & Courtois in Ringel, 8).

3 Trauma, History and Literature

In the previous chapter, I provided a discussion of trauma within the psychological field of study, where it finds its origins. Since the last decade of the previous century, trauma studies have, however, enjoyed renewed attention, mainly outside of their domain of origin. In fact, contemporary insights focus more on the intersection of trauma with other fields of study, as it has become a pivotal subject connecting many different cultural disciplines (Berger, 569; Hirsch, 8; Whitehead, 4; Caruth, *Explorations in Memory*, 4). As a result, a theory of trauma has originated, its concepts becoming tools of literary and cultural analysis (Berger, 572; Whitehead 4).

Why, then, is it precisely trauma that has attracted such attention, causing it to intersect with other disciplines? The explanation can be found in trauma's preoccupying place in contemporary society. First of all, the late twentieth century is a time marked by historical catastrophe (*see supra*, 2.2). Moreover, popular culture and mass media enhance the interest in trauma, because of their obsession with violence, their preoccupation with family dysfunctions and their fascination for the "enigmatic figure of the survivor" (Berger, 571).

Within the different cultural disciplines trauma connects, the focus has mainly been put on two in particular: history and literature. As a result, trauma theory has had consequences for the connection between both, blurring their distinctions in usage. First of all, the gaps between historical approaches to culture and textual ones may be bridged. Moreover, individual experiences of trauma may become collective ones. And finally, different modes of representation – factual as well as fictional ones – can prove useful to represent history (Hirsch, 9; Berger, 572-573). Moreover, trauma theory has provided several new insights for both domains separately thanks to the work of different scholars, a number of whom will be discussed in the following chapter.

3.1 Trauma and History

3.1.1 Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub

Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub were the first to publish their thoughts on the influence of trauma on history in their book *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History* (1991). Later on, they have published several other essays on the subject. As the title of their first work suggests, both authors focus on the issue of witnessing. This matter will therefore be discussed in paragraph 3.2.1.1. To solve the problems of witnessing, they point to the importance of testifying. The relevance of testimony will, consequently, be dealt with in paragraph 3.2.1.2.

3.1.1.1 *The Issue of Witnessing*

As one of the most important historical, but also traumatic, events of the previous century, the Holocaust has been the subject of Felman and Laub's attention. As Laub puts it, "*the event produced no witnesses*" ("An Event without a Witness", 80). In fact, the people involved in the Holocaust can roughly be subdivided into three major groups: perpetrators, victims and by-standers (Laub, "Truth and Testimony", 66). Into the category of perpetrators, are included all those who have contributed to the persecution and extermination of the victims. By victims are meant those who have suffered directly from the atrocities of the Holocaust, i.e. those who have come into direct contact with the perpetrators. By by-standers are then indicated those who were not directly affected by the events of the Holocaust, but who were certainly aware of what was happening at the time. Laub refers to the first two categories as "witnesses from inside", while he calls the third category "outside witnesses" ("Bearing Witness", 81).

None of the three categories has however succeeded in witnessing what was happening. The perpetrators, naturally, tried to hide their own cruelties. The by-standers, then, failed to occupy their position as a witness, as they lacked responsiveness to the situation. Possibly, they were afraid for their own fate or they were in denial about what was happening. As to the victims, a major part died during the Holocaust and was obviously unable to testify. Those who survived were, however, expected to testify about what they had experienced. Yet, they, too, were incapable of doing so, as they were traumatized by "the inherently incomprehensible *and* deceptive psychological structure of the event" (Laub, "An Event without a Witness", 80). The very nature of the event made it, in fact, impossible to testify. As Laub concludes, "there was, thus, historically no witness to the Holocaust, either from outside or from inside the event" (81).

The distinction between the three groups – those of perpetrators, victims and bystanders – is however not as neat as it is described above. In fact, there were certain overlaps between the three, especially between victims and perpetrators. This overlap is best explained by a term introduced by Primo Levi: 'the gray zone'. The term can be defined as "the incredibly complicated internal structure of Auschwitz, which created moral ambiguity and compromise in ways large and small" (Jonathan Petropoulos and John Roth, VXII). The gray zone, thus, includes those who were willing to collaborate with the Nazis in exchange for certain advantages. However, there were also many victims who were forced to collaborate. Those who were, for instance, obliged to prepare the ones waiting to go to the gas chambers. Furthermore, the gray zone includes those who were confronted with a so-called 'choiceless choice', a term introduced by Lawrence Langer in 1982. The term refers to the dilemmas created by Nazi Germany and its collaborators, who often put Jews and other victims in circumstances where

they had to make decisions among hideous options that could not even be described as involving so-called 'lesser of evils' (Langer, 72).

Levi emphasizes that there were more people belonging to the gray zone than others at Auschwitz, because of the enormous pressure exerted by the perpetrators (Levi in Petropoulos and Roth, XVII). This collaboration led, naturally, to a feeling of extreme guilt in the victims, a feeling they would carry with them for the rest of their lives. That is of course, if they survived. Because, even though the collaborators of the gray zone received certain benefits, they were most often sent to the gas chambers themselves after a certain amount of time. This was to prevent them from witnessing to their imposed job, should the Nazi regime ever be defeated.

3.1.1.2 *The Importance of Testimony*

Holocaust survivors were thus unable to witness their own experiences. According to Dori laub, "testimony is the process by which the narrator (the survivor) reclaims his position as a witness" ("An Event without a Witness", 85). Cathy Caruth, too, believes that the position of witness is reclaimed through the process of testimony (*Unclaimed Experience*, 63). Moreover, Dori Laub urges on the importance of talking about one's traumatic experiences, as he warns for the effects on the survivor's, should s/he choose to remain silent ("An Event without a Witness", 79):

The "not telling" of the [survivor's] story serves as a perpetuation of its tyranny. The events become more and more distorted in their silent retention and pervasively invade and contaminate the survivor's daily life. The longer the story remains untold, the more distorted it becomes in the survivor's conception of it, so much so that the survivor doubt the reality of the actual events (79).

Van der Kolk en van der Hart, too, emphasize the relevance of testifying. They claim that survivor's may be incapable of assimilating new memories, if they have not thoroughly processed their traumatic ones (165). The act of testifying is thus indispensable in order to repossess as well as to continue one's own life story.

A testimony is, however, always part of a dialogue. The testifier is thus in need of a listener – a "blank screen on which the event comes to be inscribed for the first time" (Laub, "Bearing Witness", 57). Accordingly, the listener becomes "a witness to the witness" (Levine, 4), a "Holocaust witness *before* the narrator does" (Laub, "An Event without a Witness", 85). As Levine argues, the listener in this way takes on "co-responsibility for an intolerable burden" (7). Laub, too, points to a "joint responsibility [as] the source of the reemerging truth" (An Event without a Witness, 85). In other words, the survivor feels as if s/he is no longer the only

one responsible for bearing witness. As a result, the survivor is now able to repossess the act of witnessing, which s/he felt was previously impossible (85). Listening to a traumatic testimony is, however not without risk. This risk will be discussed further on in this thesis.

In conclusion, Felman and Laub's writings have had a major influence on the historical field of study. Eye witnesses were namely regarded as very reliable sources for historical accounts. Felman and Laub have, however, argued that witnesses may not always be as reliable if they are witnesses to traumatic events, like for instance the Holocaust. In order to repossess his/her own memories, a survivor thus needs to testify about them. By listening to his/her testimony, the hearer becomes responsible too, because of which the narrator feels strong enough to recollect his/her past.

3.1.2 Dominick LaCapra

From 1994 – the year *Representing the Holocaust: History, Theory, Trauma* was published – onwards, historian Dominick LaCapra has devoted various other works to the subject of trauma in relation to history. More precisely, he sought to elaborate a theory on how traumatic historical events are experienced, handled and transmitted (Berger, 575). In the following paragraphs, I will deal with three major psychoanalytic topics LaCapra has focused on in his work: the return of the repressed (3.2.2.1), acting out versus working through (3.2.2.2) and the dynamics of transference (3.2.2.3). As will become clear, these three topics are interrelated and thus in interaction with each other.

3.1.2.1 The Return of the Repressed

As to the return of the repressed, LaCapra supports Freud's claim that an experience for which one was not prepared only becomes traumatic when it is repeated in a later one, which somehow recalls the earlier one and in this way "triggers a traumatic response" (*Writing History*, 82). He, too, thus insists on a period of latency – *Nachträglichkeit* in Freud's terminology – between the original traumatic event and its experience, triggered by a later event:

Trauma is effected belatedly through repetition, for the numbingly traumatic event does not register at the time of its occurrence but only after a temporal gap or period of latency, at which time it is immediately repressed, split off, or disavowed (*History, Theory, Trauma*, 174).

LaCapra argues that the trauma which occurred during the initial event is not registered as such because "the mode of aggression departs so far from expectations that it is unbelievable and

met with incredulity and a total lack of preparedness” (History and Memory, 41). In other words, the event is so inconceivable that a person can impossibly be prepared for it – that is, prepared to feel the emotions that such an event should provoke. This insight is based on Freud’s belief that trauma is caused by fright, i.e. “the shock of something unexpected that suddenly attacks the ego” (*see supra*, 2.1.2).

3.1.2.2 *Acting-out versus Working-through*

LaCapra thus believes that a traumatic historical event, if not confronted critically, does not disappear. Instead, the repressed returns in the form of compulsive repetitions (*Reflections*, 126; *History and Memory*, 46). He defines these repetitions as instances of *acting-out*, a term he opposes to that of *working-through* – a distinction inspired by Freud’s earlier division between melancholia and mourning (Whitehead, 169; LaCapra, *Writing History*, 65; LaCapra, *History and Memory*, 45).

With acting-out, LaCapra refers to a trauma victim’s obsessive, repetitive behavior, through which s/he keep returning to the moment of the crisis (*Writing History*, 21; *History, Theory, Trauma*, xii). The acting-out of trauma can occur on a mental as well as on a physical level (Codde, “Course”). In both cases, the victim tries to “relive what was not lived” (LaCapra, *History and Memory*, 122). In the first case, the victim, who has missed the crisis moment, is offered a new chance to relive the traumatic experience and to feel the appropriate emotions caused by it. In the second case, the victim, who, again, has missed the crisis moment, tries to capture the experience with his body. He literally keeps acting out the experience, in order not to lose it.

Working through, then, implies an overcoming of the victim’s traumatic after effects. It is, however, not a simple forgetting of the trauma. Instead, the victim’s trauma should become a part of his/her existence that s/he can deal with. In other words, the trauma becomes manageable.

Both processes – acting out and working through – should, however, not be seen as mere opposites. In fact, they constitute a distinction, in that they are both in interaction with each other (LaCapra, *Writing History*, 150). To start working through a trauma, a patient will, in fact, have to go through some acting outs first (LaCapra, *History, Memory, Trauma*, 48; 205).

A distinction similar to that between acting out and working through has been made by Eric Santner. In his 1992 essay “History beyond the Pleasure Principle: Some Thoughts on the Representation of Trauma”, Santner introduced the term of ‘narrative fetishism’, in opposition to ‘mourning’ – a term he has thus literally taken over from Freud (144). Both narrative

fetishism and mourning are “responses to loss, to a past that refuses to go away due to its traumatic impact” (Santner, 144). As the definitions show, narrative fetishism and mourning can be considered as possible expressions of LaCapra’s broader categories of respectively acting out and working through:

By narrative fetishism I mean the construction and deployment of a narrative consciously or unconsciously designed to expunge the traces of the trauma or loss that called that narrative into being in the first place [...] The work of mourning is a process of elaborating and integrating the reality of loss or traumatic shock by remembering and repeating it in symbolically and dialogically mediated doses; it is a process of translating, troping and figuring loss [...] Narrative fetishism, by contrast, is the way an inability or refusal enacts traumatic events; it is a strategy of undoing, in fantasy, the need for mourning by stimulating a condition of intactness, typically by situating the site and origin of loss elsewhere. Narrative fetishism releases one from the burden of having to reconstitute one’s self-identity under posttraumatic conditions; in narrative fetishism, the ‘post’ is indefinitely postponed (Santner, 144).

3.2.2.3 Transference

The last topic is that of transference, which means “a return of the repressed, or rather a more conscious summoning of the repressed; transference repeats or acts out a past event or relationship in a new, therapeutic setting that allows for critical evaluation and change” (Berger, 576). It is thus through transference that a patient can start to work through his/her trauma. The most straightforward way to transfer, and thus to work through the trauma is to testify about it (*see supra*, 3.1.1). The patient needs to create a rational and chronological story about what has happened to him. In this way, s/he learns to understand what has happened to him/her, to get a grip on the things that were unconsciously already there, as well as to escape from the repetitive clutch of the trauma.

As I have explained in the previous chapter, the victim is thus in need of a listener. The latter takes on an important task, as s/he is indispensable for the victim’s process of working through. This task is, however, not without risks. LaCapra indeed warns for the danger of over-identification with the narrator, which he defines as a ‘vicarious experience’, as opposed to a ‘virtual’ one (*History in Transit*, 125). A virtual experience causes “emotional response [...] with respect for the other and the realization that the experience of the other is not one’s own” (*Writing History*, 40). This sort of experience implies a feeling of empathy in the listener or – as LaCapra terms it – “empathic unsettlement” (41). A virtual experience, which thus requires empathic unsettlement, is different from a vicarious one in that it “puts oneself in the other’s

position while recognizing the difference of that position and hence not taking the other's place" (78). Vicarious experiences, on the other hand, imply a complete identification with the victim – the listener becomes a "surrogate victim" (LaCapra, *History in Transit*, 125). The listener forgets that the narrated experience is someone else's instead of his own.

One of the most famous examples of a possible – yet extreme – vicarious experience is that of Benjamin Wilkomirski. In 1996, he published his book *Fragments: Memories of a Childhood, 1939-1948*. In his book, Wilkomirski describes his childhood experiences: his deportation to and survival in Polish concentration camps and his life before and after this influential event. After the publication, research has however proven that Benjamin Wilkomirski's story could not possibly be true. As Lang puts it, his book was rather "the fragments of imaginary memory" (77). Indeed, Benjamin Wilkomirski – actually born under the name of Bruno Grosjean – appeared to be a fraud (Whitehead, 31; Walker, xvii; LaCapra, *Writing History*, 32; Lang, 77). Grosjean himself, however, kept insisting on the factual and truthful nature of his writings. He was convinced that he had really experienced the traumatic events he has described in his book (Whitehead, 37). It could thus be that, although his story is clearly invented, Grosjean might not have done this consciously. Perhaps, his story results from an over-identification with – or a vicarious response to – the survivors of the many Holocaust testimonies he has devoured (Whitehead, 9). In this way, Wilkomirski/Grosjean, traumatized by reading Holocaust literature, truly believed the memories he wrote about in his book to be his, whereas they were in fact someone else's (Whitehead, 31).

3.2 Trauma and Literature

3.2.1 Cathy Caruth

As I have explained in chapter 1, the phenomenon of PTSD has only recently, i.e. after the Vietnam War, been acknowledged by the American Psychiatric Association. Although the official acknowledgement of the pathology has provided a very powerful category of diagnosis, in which the symptoms of multiple violent occurrences could now be classified, Caruth claims that, at the same time, "this powerful new tool has provided anything but a solid explanation of disease" (*Explorations in Memory*, 3). Indeed, our understanding and curing of traumatic disorders has only been complicated. As a result, Caruth, too, argues for the contribution of a variety of disciplines to the work on trauma. Even more so, she insists on the necessity of such a "multifaceted approach" (*Explorations in Memory*, ix). She herself is most interested in the domain of literature – and more specifically in two ways: in how trauma affects literature and especially in how literature can help to understand trauma.

Like Sigmund Freud, Caruth believes that the experience of a traumatic event is reenacted through its repetition (*Unclaimed Experience*, 1). These repetitions seem to appear, however, outside of the wish or control of the traumatized survivor, yet through his/her own unknowing acts (2). As I have explained earlier, Freud believed that trauma – described by Caruth as “a wound inflicted not upon the body but on the mind” (3) – could not be available to consciousness because it happened too unexpectedly. It is, then, only when the experiences imposes itself again, that the trauma can be truly processed. In this way, a traumatic experience has to be understood in terms of what is known, but also of what was not known in its first instance and what remains unknown in its following instances. (4) Caruth, however, goes beyond Freud’s – and LaCapra’s – belief that a traumatic event is forgotten and repeated after a period of latency. She, on the other hand, claims that the repression of a traumatic event is built into this event itself – that its latency is inherent. She explains that:

The central enigma revealed by Freud’s example, is not so much the period of forgetting that occurs after the accident, but rather the fact that the victim of the crash was never fully conscious during the accident itself [...]. The experience of trauma, the fact of latency, would thus seem to consist, not in the forgetting of a reality that can hence never be fully known, but in an inherent latency within the experience itself. (*Explorations in Memory*, 7-8)

In others words, a traumatic event is never really experienced when it occurs, as it is not possible to register it. As a result, the traumatic event keeps returning to the victim: it gives him/her a second chance to feel the feelings s/he should have felt at the moment of impact. Paradoxically enough, the event is preserved in its literality, even though it could not be fully perceived. It is as if the victim did not experience, but witness the event, which can, thus, only be understood – or known – through its very inaccessibility (8).

It is this tension between what is known and what is not – or cannot be – that Caruth encounters in literature as well. She argues that “literature, like psychoanalysis, is interested in the complex relation between knowing and not knowing. And it is at the specific point at which knowing and not knowing intersect that the language of literature and the psychoanalytic theory of traumatic experience precisely meet” (*Unclaimed Experience*, 3). Therefore, she believes that literature can help us understand traumatic experience, as it “teaches readers to listen to what can be told only in indirect and surprising ways” (*Explorations in Memory*, Back Cover) – to what can be known only through what is not.

3.2.2 Marianne Hirsch

The previous insights essentially focus on the direct victims of a traumatic experience. As to the event of the Holocaust, these victims have been called ‘first generation’ survivors. The term is mostly used to indicate the actual survivors of the concentration camps, but can be expanded to all of those victimized by the Holocaust – directly and indirectly (Verstrynge, 9). Eve Hoffman, however, argues that this first generation trauma can be transmitted to the “hinge generation” (xv). Therefore, Marianne Hirsch has introduced the term ‘postmemory’. She defines it as follows:

Postmemory is distinguished from memory by generational distance and from history by deep personal connection. Postmemory is a powerful and very particular form of memory precisely because its connection to its object or source is mediated not through recollection but through an imaginative investment and creation. [...] Postmemory characterizes the experience of those who grow up dominated by narratives that preceded their birth, whose own belated stories are evacuated by the stories of the previous generation shaped by traumatic events that can be neither understood nor recreated (22).

Codde argues, however, that the term of postmemory can be applied even better to the third generation, as the second generation – the children of survivors – can actually be said to inherit their parents’ trauma (6). The third generation – the survivors’ grandchildren –, on the other hand, does not really suffer from the traumas of the past. Instead, this generation is “marked by a healthy obsession [...] with a past that needs to be remembered with the kind of zeal displayed by these grandchildren” (6). As postmemory is concerned with layering, mediation, inaccessibility and the transmission of unreliable documents, the literary medium seems most appropriate for its representation. Literature becomes, thus, even more relevant to deal with trauma in the generations following the first one.

4 Issues of representation

Next to the various theoretical insights which have sought to help us understand trauma, many artistic creations dealing with traumatic content have arisen. As one of the major traumatic events of the previous century, the Second World War, too, has given rise to many artistic creations. This artistic tradition has, however, not been appreciated by everyone. The subject of the Holocaust indeed brings with it certain implications which make it difficult to represent its events adequately. That is why, in the following chapter, I will begin by discussing some negative reactions to the representation of the Holocaust. Furthermore, I will provide some of the main difficulties in representing the subject. Finally, I will consider why it can be important nonetheless to represent the atrocities that have taken place during the Shoah.

4.1 Holocaust Representation: A Source of Commotion

The most famous citation reflecting society's anxiety towards Holocaust representations must be Theodor Adorno's, who, in 1949, stated that it would be barbaric to write poetry after Auschwitz (Adorno and Tiedermann, xv). As this opposition towards poetry can, in fact, be extended to all artistic creations (Adorno and Tiedermann, xvi), it is this citation which has led to the widespread demand that the Holocaust should be represented as it really happened (Kerner, 5). It has thereby led to the creation of a normative moral taboo, based on a claim of historical fidelity. Here, however, we stumble upon another difficulty. As Elie Wiesel claims, there exists some kind of inherent limit to the representation of the Holocaust: its events are ultimately unrepresentable in any form (Wiesel in Hirsch, 5-6). Consequently, it is here that literature as well as film find their hardest challenge, in that they have to deal with the paradox of visualizing and narrating a trauma that cannot be captured in text or image, a trauma that is, in fact, "trying to remember an absence", "trying to represent the unrepresentable" (Hirsch, X). And, as Kerner emphasizes, "a Holocaust film [or text] is *not* the event; it is a *re*-presentation of the event, and fidelity as such is always already a problematic enterprise" (3).

There is, however, a paradox to these concerns on Holocaust representation, as they may in fact result from the existence of trauma film and literature itself. On the one hand, trauma cinema and literature are due to the demands of fidelity to history, which have proven to be unfulfillable. On the other hand, it is trauma representation itself that makes one aware that traumatic history is not always reliable. It draws one's attention to the fact that all evidence can be manipulated, depending on what one wants to show, on which image one wants to create. But, it also draws our attention to the fact that the truth lies somewhere between what really happened and the way this is pictured mentally, as every person experiences, processes and

reproduces events in a different way. This brings us back to the first point, namely that it is impossible to represent history as it truly happened.

4.2 Difficulties in Representing the Holocaust: the Issue of Witnessing

Now then, why is it that the Holocaust is regarded as unrepresentable? The explanation has to do with the broader issue on the possibility – or rather the impossibility – of witnessing, which has already been discussed earlier in this thesis. Although one could assume that the events of the Holocaust are fully knowable, as there were sufficient survivors who could testify about what has happened, there are two major arguments which dispute this assumption. First of all, as Hayden White asserts, no historical representation gives access to essential truth (Hirsch, 5). Indeed, every historian gives his/her own, subjective interpretation of the facts, reproduced into a text with a teleological plot. In his essay “Historical Text as Literary Artifact”, he claims that a good historian reminds his readers “of the purely provisional nature of his characterization of events, agents and agencies found in always incomplete historical record” (White in Kerner, 310). Secondly, as Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub have described it, the Holocaust was essentially “an event-without-witness” (*see supra*, 3.1.1). Without reliable witnesses, it seems impossible to represent the Holocaust truthfully – according to historical demands, that is.

4.3 The Value of Holocaust Representation

Although it may be impossible to represent the events of the Holocaust as they factually happened due to the impossibility of witnessing, it can nevertheless be valuable to portray them. One should, however be aware that one is only watching/reading a representation of the event, instead of the event itself. As a consequence, it is wrong to expect complete equivalence between the historical event and the artistic creation originating from it. It is, in fact, important not to focus on factual information when encountering a Holocaust representation; the emotions behind it may be more important. Walker defines this distinction as one between respectively veridical memories and pseudomemories (5-6). It is, then, the distinction between both memories – and our awareness of this distinction – which enables us to recognize the historical meaning pseudomemories possess.

This claim is backed up by Dori Laub, who describes the story of a female Holocaust survivor, who was being interviewed on a conference of historians, psychoanalysts and artists (“Bearing Witness, 59). The woman testified that she saw four chimneys being blown up during the Auschwitz uprising. Historical evidence has, however, proven that only one chimney exploded. Laub asserts:

A lively debate ensued. The testimony was not accurate, historians claimed. The number of chimneys was misrepresented. Historically, only one chimney was blown up, not all four. Since the memory of the testifying woman turned out to be, in this way, fallible, one could not accept – not give credence to – her whole account of the events (“Bearing Witness”, 59-60).

Laub, however, disagrees:

The woman was testifying [...] not to the number of the chimneys blown up, but to something else, more radical, more crucial: the reality of an unimaginable occurrence. One chimney blown up in Auschwitz was as incredible as four. The number mattered less than the fact of the occurrence. The event itself was almost inconceivable. The woman testified to an event that broke the all compelling frame of Auschwitz, where Jewish armed revolts just did not happen, and had no place. She testified to the breakage of a framework. That was historical truth (“Bearing Witness”, 60).

In conclusion, not all artistic renderings on the subject of the Holocaust have been appreciated by everyone. It is, indeed, not always simple to do so accurately. However, when encountering an artistic representation of a traumatic event, it may be more important to consider the creation’s emotional historical value, instead of its factual one.

5 Trauma and Art

As I have mentioned in Chapter 4, the Holocaust – like other traumatic events – has given rise to many artistic creations. These creations are to be found in every possible artistic domain: from literature to painting, music to architecture, the theatre to sumptuary arts. The two domains which are relevant to this thesis are, of course, those of literature and cinema. These two will, therefore, be discussed in more detail. Naturally, both media have their own specific qualities in the representation of traumatic content. However, there are also a certain amount of similarities between the two. In what follows, I will, therefore, start by discussing the similarities between both media. Next, I will look at differences between the two, thereby focusing on the reasons for which literature and cinema can both be considered appropriate art forms in representing traumatic experiences. Next, I will focus on trauma literature and cinema dealing specifically with the subject of the Holocaust in.

5.1 Trauma Literature and Cinema: Shared Characteristics

One of the most important similarities between trauma literature and trauma cinema is their shared aim. That is, to break the silence and ignore taboos concerning traumatic experiences (Miller and Tougaw, 2). In this way, literature and film help to make traumatic experiences more manageable – to “transform mere knowledge into vision and bear the reader [or viewer] beyond the realm of familiar imagining into the bizarre limbo of atrocity” (Langer, 12). This goal is, in fact, due to society’s desire for common ground. An artistic rendering of traumatic content can thus help making witnesses’ private, individual trauma into a public, collective one (Hirsch, 20). In this way literature and film – just like other artistic creations on the subject – contribute to the remembrance, maybe even the honoring and supporting of the people who suffer from or have suffered from traumatic memories (Walker, XXII; Ezrahi; xi). Moreover, survivors can benefit from testifying through the medium of art, as it can help them work through their trauma (Ezrahi, 16).

Another similarity between trauma literature and film is their mode of narration. Both media needed to satisfy certain requirements in order to meet the representational demands of traumatic experiences. In this way, the two media had to abandon classical realist forms of narration. Instead, they had to turn to modernist forms of narration, as these formally repeat the structure of a traumatic experience and call attention to the complexity of memory (Hirsch, 3; Whitehead, 3, 82; King, 60).

It is appropriate to return here to Pierre Janet's distinction between narrative and traumatic memories, linked respectively to realist and modernist narration. Realist narration, like narrative memory, is characterized by the fact that it makes use of a linear chronology of events (Hirsch, 21). In this way, readers/spectators feel indifferent as to the events narrated, partly due to a sense of mastery over time. They do not feel personally implicated in what happens nor recognize themselves in the characters of the story. The reader/spectator is thus "a false witness, one who can slip in and out of the witnessing position at will without having to experience the existential consequences of this act" (Hirsch, 21). Modernist narration, on the other hand, is a fragmented form of narration. Like traumatic memory, modernist narration does not express events in a linear way. On the contrary, it makes use of disorienting time shifts. Both writers and film makers, thus, began experimenting with the expression of time in their work. Writers started making use of, for instance, repetitions and indirections (Whitehead, 3), while film makers began to play particularly with montage. In this way, traumatic content could be passed over in a more vivid and adequate way, closer to life.

As a result of this specific form of narration, the audience might risk to experience a shock when reading/watching a traumatic novel/film. Indeed, these artistic renderings may carry within them some kind of traumatic potential, which may provoke a vicarious experience (Bodger & Vice, 17). Vicarious or secondary trauma resulting from the reading/viewing of books/films is, of course, different from primary trauma in that the effects are less severe. However, these books/films can, even so, cause a psychological disturbance in their readers/viewers, which can lead to certain symptoms of PTSD (Hirsch, 17) or even to the confusion between experienced and transmitted trauma (*cfr. the Wilkomirski case*) (Whitehead, 38).

As regards the domain of film, Hirsch speaks of a posttraumatic cinema – a cinema that attempts to "formally reproduce an experience of suddenly seeing the unthinkable" (19). I believe this insight can be applied to literature as well. Trauma literature and film, thus, not only aim to represent traumatic historical events, but also to embody and reproduce the trauma for their reader/spectator.

5.2 Literature and Film as Suitable Art Forms

5.2.1 Literature

First of all, I believe traumatic literature is different from traumatic film in one major way. That is, literature is often written by trauma victims themselves. Trauma cinema, on the other hand, is most often produced by an 'outsider', someone who has not experienced the

trauma him-/herself. In this way, trauma literature can be said to have a healing effect on the writer. It can help him/her work through his/her trauma. Indeed, there are many testimonial writings which articulate the way in which trauma survivors deal with their past (Whitehead, 39). Cinema then, in contrast, is sometimes said to “exploit the memories of survivors by using them as a source for dramatization and financial profit” (39). This claim can however be refuted, since, as I have explained in the previous chapter, both media share the aim of remembrance and honoring.

5.2.2 Film

Even though literature has some of its own, specific qualities, cinema has had a special significance in the representation of traumatic experiences as well, since film is most closely analogous to both fantasy and perception (Hirsch, 6). That is, film at the same time imitates the experience of witnessing real events, as well as the experience of processing what has been witnessed through mental imagery. In other words, “cinema constitutes a kind of witnessing to both the outer, physical reality of historical events and the inner, psychological reality of the effects of those events on people” (Hirsch, 7).

Moreover, one of the aims of traumatic representations is to help people understand trauma better. For this purpose, audiovisual media have what Walker calls “intrinsic properties” that “lend themselves to [the establishment of] a fresh historiography particularly attuned to the havoc trauma wreaks” (XIX). Not only are they made up of processes of selection and ordering, they can also yield profilmic events. Walker explains:

Audiovisual media figure in their very makeup the productive dilemma of those of us who would locate historical understanding at the intersection of subjective and physical properties. [...] Audiovisual texts are also sufficiently plastic to render the shifting colors and shapes of human experience as it manifests internally, in people’s minds, and externally, in things that happen and are perceived by witnesses and participants. [Films thus have the ability] to externalize, publicize, and historicize traumatic material that would otherwise remain at the level of the internal, individual psychology (XIX).

Philippe Codde, too, claims the film medium has certain advantages compared to literature. He, namely, states that traumatic experiences are iconic in nature and can thus be better represented visually (“Postmemory, Afterimages”, 2) This claim is further acknowledged by Libby Saxton, who argues that “visual representations [...] make historical events more real, tangible, and immediately accessible [...] than written ones” (103).

5.3 Holocaust Literature and Film

As one of the major traumatic instances of the past century, the Holocaust has given rise to the creation of countless cinematic and literary renderings of the event. This artistic tradition has, however, only begun to develop in the years following the Second World War and mostly even in the 1990s, forty-five years after its actual occurrence (Whitehead, 4; Hirsch, 3). Due to the Nazis' policy secrecy, which included for instance a ban on filming, there are hardly any documents remaining from the actual events. (Hirsch, 12). In fact, Hirsch claims that there is only one known piece of film footage of the mass murdering itself (1).

Today, on the other hand, films as well as books on the subject keep emerging. Many of these creations share similar characteristics, as to form as well as content. These recurring aspects will therefore be discussed in the following paragraphs.

5.3.1 Form

First of all, it is meaningful to look at the genre of a literary/cinematic work, as it dramatically shapes the perception its content. A poem, for instance, has to be interpreted differently from a scientific article. Similarly, the content of a comedy is not processed in the same way as that of a documentary. As a result, certain genres are considered more appropriate to represent certain content than others. Hayden White, for instance, claims that people often assume that historical films, dealing with a serious theme – like the Holocaust –, demand to be represented in a noble genre, like the epic or the tragedy (White in Kerner, 4). Kerner adds that films that transcend the boundaries of conventional dramatic cinema, like documentaries, are often met with deep suspicion (Kerner, 4).

Robert Eaglestone and Barry Langford, however, claim that the division between high and low genres is often elided by the topic of the Holocaust (6). Evidence for this claim can be found in the many different literary and cinematic genres used for Holocaust representations today. Some literary examples are Art Spiegelman's graphic novel *Maus*, Anne Frank's diary *Het Achterhuis* and Jonathan Safran Foer's novel *Everything is illuminated*. Some cinematic examples are Claude Lanzmann's documentary *Shoah*, the mini-series *Holocaust* and Spielberg historical drama *Schindler's List*.

Secondly, Holocaust representations often have the same mode of narration. As I have discussed earlier, the realist mode of narration proved inadequate to represent traumatic experiences. Consequently, artists make use of narrative techniques stemming from (post)modernism. In literature, this, for instance, resulted in the use of mediation, layering, multiple narrative perspectives and disorienting time shifts. In film, directors often make use of

flashbacks. The flashback technique is indeed appropriate to express traumatic experience, as it seems to be “the perfect analogue for the posttraumatic symptom to which it lent its name” (Hirsch, 92).

5.3.2 Content

The first recurring element has to do with characterization, and more specifically with the representation of victims and perpetrators. Kerner confirms that their representation indeed forms one of the major thematic tropes of Holocaust film (4) – and literature. Generally, Holocaust victims – especially the Jewish ones – are feminized and passivized (Doneson, 79; Kerner, 4)). Perpetrators, on the other hand, tend to be characterized as having superhuman strength. Moreover, they are often depicted as sadistic, a character trait which can be impersonated in different forms. Accordingly, it can take on the form of mere cruelty. The perpetrator then derives pleasure from his/her victim’s pain. It can, however, go further than this, manifesting in a “radical application of reason ungoverned by ethics” (Kerner, 4).

Certain thematic themes which often occur in Holocaust literature and film are linked to the representation the trauma survivors. Kremer confirms that writers/directors regularly focus on the problems of postwar survival trauma, caused by the survivors’ physical and mental wounds (20). First of all, Holocaust survivors are frequently marked by a feeling of guilt – ‘survivor-guilt’. This guilt can have different origins. First of all, the survivors may feel guilt simply for surviving, while so many others have not – for outliving their family and friends (20). Furthermore, they might feel guilty for the things they have done in order to survive (*cfr. the gray zone*).

Secondly, the focus often lies on the survivor’s loss of religious faith (Kremer, 52). Due to his/her past experiences, it is no longer possible for the survivor to believe in the existence of an almighty God – a God who is loving toward all he has made.

Lastly, a theme which often recurs in Holocaust literature and film is that of survivors’ physical degradation. This includes survivors’ “long-term, Holocaust-generated physical ailments” (Kremer, 20), but also the ways in which Holocaust survivors destroy themselves physically in an attempt to forget their past. This can, for instance, manifest in alcohol abuse or sexual liberality and, in its most extreme form, death.

In conclusion, literature and film can both be regarded as appropriate media for representing traumatic content. As I have explained, they share multiple characteristics in doing so. Yet, I have also briefly pointed out certain general differences between the two, thereby focusing on their ability to represent traumatic content. In the following chapter, I will,

however, look into the differences between cinema and literature in more detail. More specifically, I will focus on the distinctions between both media when representing the same story. In what follows, I will, in other words, discuss the process of adaptation from novel to film.

6 Adapting Literature to Film

Like other literary genres, trauma literature has given rise to cinematic adaptations. There are several advantages to these cinematic adaptations. First of all, cinema was and still is one of the most influential mass media (Joshua Hirsch, 6; Denis McQuail, 8; Langford, 66). Consequently, cinema reaches a far broader public than literature does (London in Lupack, 4). Indeed, film is a story-telling medium that is enjoyed by every section of the population nowadays. This, however, has not always been the case. In its early days, cinema was regarded as a diversion for the lower class (Cook, 35). As the poor were unable to read, films were used either simply for their amusement, or to instill certain messages, such as, for example, war propaganda. Thus, cinema was and still is used to influence the mass, either in a positive or a negative way. It is this influence that, according to Barbara Tapa Lupack, is one of the elements that has informed the rise of adaptations of fiction and plays, as their material was seen as respectable and, thus, did not risk the attacks of censorship (3). Literature, on the other hand, was seen as a pastime for the upper class. Not only did the rich have the opportunity to learn to read, they also had the money to buy books, which were rather expensive objects at the time. This early distinction between the two media is often still mirrored today, as will be made clear when I will be talking about the reception of novels and their adaptations.

A second advantage, next to that of reaching the different social strata, is that the cinematic medium attracts more people from different age groups than literature does. Whereas a film can be accessible to a wide variety of ages, a novel is often restricted to a particular age-bracket.

Moreover, literature and film are simply different types of media, as the former is absorbed by the mental level, the “mind’s eye”, and the latter by the various senses (Stam, 6). As a result, literature is less concrete than film. By this I mean that literature, and especially the novel, gives its readers more freedom to fill in its story with his/her own imagination than the film does its spectators. Consequently, visually rendered representations often have a higher impact than written ones, as the former are more direct and concrete.

Furthermore, while a novelist works on his/her own, with his/her own imagination, only in need of a pen and a piece of paper, a film director collaborates with an entire film crew and has to pay attention to the material possibilities, like the budget, the infrastructure and an appropriate cast (Stam, 16-17).

Also, both media have their own specific traits. Film, for instance, can represent the

verbal and non-verbal, a capacity novels lack. Because of this, film has more resources for expression, as it multiplies registers.

Therefore, it is wrong to expect equivalency between source and adaptation (Stam, 18). Rather, a source novel should be seen as a database for possible filmic interpretations. Consequently, when assessing an adaptation, one should not focus on comparing book to film, one should insist on comparing interpretation to interpretation (Boyum in Lupack, 10), as each medium has its own advantages and disadvantages for expressing certain messages and transmitting certain ideas.

Yet, although both media have their specific advantages, filmic adaptations are often regarded as inferior to their source. In what follows, I will, therefore start by discussing the way adaptations were, and sometimes still are, commonly perceived and why that is so. However, this negative perception has begun to change, in the last decades. The reasons for this change will hence be addressed in paragraph 6.2, turning to theoretical as well as practical issues.

6.1 Adaptations and Common Perception

As Robert Stam puts it in the introduction to his and Alessandra Raengo's book *Literature and Film: a Guide to the Theory and Practice of Film Adaptation*, filmic adaptations can be seen as "mutations" of their source, thereby helping it to survive, be it in a different form (3). Stam, thus, insists on the first, literal, meaning of the word "adaptation", defined in the Cambridge Dictionary as:

"The process of changing to suit different conditions: *Evolution occurs as a result of adaptation to new environments*" (p. 14-15).

It is only in its second definition that the word receives the meaning I will use in this thesis:

"A film, book, play, etc. that has been made from another film, book, play, etc.: *Last year he starred in the film adaptation of Bill Cronshaw's best-selling novel*" (p.14).

As the adaptation, in Stam's proposal, contributes to the survival of its source, adaptations are seen as something positive. Lupack, however, argues that this is usually not the case. Much more often, adaptations are considered "parasite[s]", sucking the life out of their hosts (5). Indeed, common perception focuses on what has been lost when transposing novel to film, without considering those things that may have been gained. In general, adaptation critics indeed posit that cinema does a disservice to literature. These unconscious assumptions about

filmic adaptations stem from different prejudices, which are broadly shared in society. I will, therefore, briefly discuss several of the most persistent prejudices in the following paragraph.

6.1.1 Prejudices towards Literary Adaptations

First of all, there is the general assumption that an adaptation should remain loyal to its source. As McFarlane puts it, there is a “near-fixation with the issue of fidelity” (*Novel to Film*, 194). Whether or not an adaptation is appreciated depends on whether or not it seems faithful to its source novel. As I have mentioned earlier, the adaptation is however also regularly compared to a parasite, which crawls into the body of its source text and sponges off its vitality. In this way, the adaptation is seen as a mere copy of its source; the genre’s own contributions are completely denied. There is thus a dangerous tension between the demand of remaining loyal and the demand of being original: whereas it is not necessary for a filmic adaptation to be “faithful to the ‘letter’” (McFarlane, 8), it should, however, capture its source’s core meaning, its essence (Stam, 14; McFarlane, 9).

The second assumption follows from the first one, as Leitch argues that the demand of fidelity basically relies on “an appeal to anteriority” (162). This claim is confirmed by McFarlane who claims that “the fidelity issue [is] no doubt ascribable in part to the novel’s coming first” (*Novel to Film*, 8). Indeed, people often believe that what came first, is necessarily better (Lupack, 6). Robert Stam defines this as the “a priori valorization of historical anteriority and seniority” (4). This means that literature takes the lead on cinema, an art which originated later than the former. In fact, literature here profits from a double priority. First of all, literature in general is historically older than cinema (McFarlane, “It Wasn’t Like That in the Book”, 5). But, a novel also has a specific priority, in that it was always written before its filmic adaptation.

The third assumption has to do with what Stam describes as the “myth of facility” (7). To start with, this myth implies that writing a novel is more difficult than making a film. Moreover, it has to do with the reception of both media. It is, in fact, generally assumed that everyone can watch and comprehend a movie. Reading a novel, however, is not for everyone. In other words, one needs to be more intelligent in order to successfully read a novel than to watch a film. As a result, “a high culture/popular culture hierarchy” (McFarlane, “It Wasn’t Like That in the Book”, 4) linked to a higher/lower class dichotomy is imposed. Adaptations indeed tend to be regarded as the easier version of their source novel, making the latter in this way accessible to all sections of the population, including those who lack – using a term by Pierre Bourdieu – the “cultural capital” to read and understand novels (Stam, 7). However, it has to be noted that grasping the correct meaning of neither novel nor film is evident, especially

when one encounters it for the first time.

A last source of hostility towards adaptations is informed by what Stam defines as “anti-corporeality, a distaste for the unseemly “embodiedness” of the filmic text.” The “seen” is regarded as “obscene” (6). While the novel functions on a higher, cerebral level, film turns to all of a person’s senses, thereby provoking vulgar, bodily responses (Marks, 214). Images, to wit, provoke inordinate passions, which are not provoked by the source novel. However, one has to be aware of the fact that these provoking images are already present in the verbal text, as a hidden dimension.

6.2 A Change in Perception

6.2.1 Theoretical Changes

The previously discussed prejudices towards filmic adaptation of novels have somewhat abated in the 1960s and 1970s. Next to that of some other movements – like for instance reception theory and cultural studies – it was especially the coming of structuralism and poststructuralism which has had a major influence (Raengo and Stam, 8). The notion of ‘a text’ has been broadened by these theoretical movements, as they regarded all signifying practices as productive of texts. In this way, all texts, literary and non-literary, were considered to be of equal value.

Two important terms originated in the structuralist movement. Firstly, Kristeva introduced the notion of intertextuality, meaning that all new texts are based on and critically transform previous ones (Kristeva, 85). Secondly, Genette proposed his concept of transtextuality, i.e. “all that sets the text in a relationship, whether obvious or concealed, with other texts” (1). Both of these terms emphasize the endless permutation of texts, which is the basis of adaptation.

Another theoretical, poststructuralist current which can be said to have influenced our perspective on adaptation is Jacques Derrida’s deconstructionism. In his 1963 essay “Cogito et Histoire de la Folie”, Derrida has introduced the concept of “différance”, claiming that a text only receives its meaning in relation to other texts. He, therefore, reworked Ferdinand De Saussure’s structuralist thoughts on the semiotic system. De Saussure asserted that a sign only receives its meaning because of its differences to the other signs in the system (Cours De Linguistique Générale, 164-165). To this spatial dimension, Derrida has added a temporal one (255-256), which means that a sign never has the same meaning as its former or future manifestations. In this way, a text is made up of different signs, which are constantly changing. The text only receives its meaning in comparison to other texts, and it can be reinterpreted

differently each time it is read or manifested. To conclude, each text has an endless number of possible interpretations. This theory can, indeed, be applied to adaptations, in that the original text only receives its meaning and its prestige thanks to its copies (Stam, 8). Moreover, a copy can be the original of a later copy, so original and copy are to be treated as texts of equal quality.

Finally, Bakhtin's meditation on dialogue, which seeks to "grasp human behavior through the use humans make of language" (Holquist, 15), has had important implications for the notion of the 'author'. This has, in turn, changed our outlook on adaptations. By questioning the former solid authority of the author, the originality of his/her work is challenged as well. The author now creates a "hybrid construction" (Holquist, 15), mingling his/her own words with the words of others. An adaptation can be seen under the same terms; i.e. it mingles its own discourse with the discourse of its source. Moreover, if the originality of the literary work is called into question, and it is now characterized as an unstable work, a more tolerant view towards the adaptation follows (Stam, 9).

6.2.2 Practical Changes

Next to the changes in thinking about adaptations thanks to new theoretical insights, some technical innovations took place in favor of the genre as well. More specifically, it is the sequence of innovations in film technology that has had a great impact. (Klinger, 18). By these innovations, I mean the arrival of sound, 3D, color, new types of editing, *et cetera*. In this way, filmmaking succeeded more and more in making a reality out of what Bazin has called "the myth of total cinema" (236): a striving for "an integral realism, a recreation of the world in its own image, an image unburdened by the freedom of interpretation of the artist or the irreversibility of time" (236). Indeed, film makers could no longer simply express concrete events, but even abstract ideas through the film medium. Moreover, special effects were no longer expensive. All of these innovations have thus contributed to bringing the conditions of film viewing closer to those of novel reading.

Not only have these technical innovations had an influence; the simple fact that the new media kept – and keep – growing further undermines the idea of *the original*, as from now on everything is *copyable*. Also, the new technologies clearly show that a text is "the result of constantly changing decisions about inclusion and exclusion" (Klinger, 90), which again challenges the notion of "originality". This opens the way to a broader, more tolerant perspective on filmic adaptations of novels.

7 Analysis: Sophie's Choice

In 1979, the American author William Styron published his novel *Sophie's Choice*. The novel tells the story of a youthful American writer named Stingo. When moving to Brooklyn, New York in 1947, to work on his first novel, the young Southerner meets his two future best friends, Sophie and Nathan, who appear to be involved in a turbulent relationship. Gradually, the novel deploys its subplot, which in fact inspires the core story of the book: Sophie's past during the Holocaust. In this way, the reader learns to understand the reasons for Sophie's present-day behaviour, which is characterized by physical as well as mental degradation. Near the end of the novel the main reason becomes clear: Sophie had been forced to choose which one of her children would continue to live, and which one would be sent to the gas chambers. The novel comes to its tragic end when Sophie, unable to overcome her feeling of guilt, commits suicide together with her Jewish lover Nathan.

Three years later, in 1982, Alan J. Pakula adapted Styron's novel to film. In general, Styron was rather content with the adaptation of his novel (Lupack, 8). This can be explained by the fact that Pakula has tried not to deviate much from the original story line. On the contrary, he has tried to remain *faithful* to the source novel. Moreover, the adaptation of *Sophie's Choice* has helped to make the story more well-known, as it has, in this way, been presented to a much larger audience. However, Styron felt that Pakula held back at times, claiming "that he felt the movie slighted the sadomasochistic eroticism of the book" (Styron in Kerner, 127).

The differences between both renderings will be discussed in more detail in the following chapters. I will thereby focus on the ways in which trauma is represented in both novel and film. I will, therefore, start by commenting on the form of either medium, in order to find out to which degree this aspect contributes to – or perhaps causes difficulties for – the expression of trauma. Firstly, I will look at genre, after which I will move on to the ways in which the story is composed in both representations. Subsequently, I will turn to content. First of all, I will analyze the type of narration in the novel and how this is dealt with in the film. Then, I will look at the issue of time. Finally, I will discuss how the different characters are depicted.

7.1 Form

7.1.1 Genre

As the cover of the book suggests, the form of Styron's *Sophie's Choice* is that of a novel. The Cambridge International Dictionary of English defines the book genre as follows:

A long printed story about imaginary characters and events: I'm taking a few novels to read on. *Have you read any of Jane Austen's novels?*, *His latest novel is selling really well. It is said that first novels are often autobiographical. She writes historical/detective/spy novels.* (p. 965)

This definition poses a problem, in that it supposes that a novel deals with imaginary events. However, *Sophie's Choice* deals with the event of the Holocaust, which was, of course, not imaginary. Moreover, Styron, in contrast with many other Holocaust writers is an American non-Jew, who has no involvement in the subject himself. The publication of *Sophie's Choice* has, consequently, resulted in an enormous controversy, as Styron would have been unable to truthfully represent the atrocities of the Holocaust (Hughes, 195). *Sophie's Choice* might thus seem a problematic creation at first. However, the genre of the novel has become immensely popular for Holocaust representations. Due to the impossibility of witnessing, every rendering had its restrictions, and consequently, every rendering must rely in part on imagination. On top of that, as Evan Hughes notes, "Styron had a talent for inhabiting experiences alien to his own" (195). In this way, the novel ultimately is a valuable version of a post-war experience

Three years later, Alan J. Pakula adapted Styron's novel to film, turning it into a melodrama. According to Kerner, the film exhibits all the key characteristics of the genre (10; 126), which is defined in the Cambridge International Dictionary of English as follows:

A play or style of acting in which the characters show strong emotions and behave in a more noticeable way than real people usually do: *I think you'd call the play a melodrama – it's full of unrequited love, unhappy death and unrelenting parents. The film is pure melodrama. The car's hardly damaged, there's not need to **make a melodrama out of it** (= make the situation more important than it is).* (p. 884-885)

Following the definition, it is not difficult to understand why Linda Williams subdivides the melodrama into the category of "body genres" (Williams in Kerner, 121). A body genre namely comprises those films that "provoke a visceral response in the spectator" (Kerner, 121). The melodrama can thus be regarded as a body genre, as it provokes strong emotions in the form of sadness or even tears. Its success, then, is measured "by the degree to which the audience sensation mimics what is seen on the screen" (Williams in Kerner, 121). Next to the melodrama, the genres of horror and pornography are considered body genres, as they too enhance a reciprocal relation of sensations and emotions.

Why, then, can *Sophie's Choice* be regarded as a melodrama, perhaps even as exemplary of the genre? In fact, the movie contains many of the tropes which Kerner distinguishes as

signature ones to the melodramatic genre (129).

First of all, there is the trope of the tortured body. When Sophie arrived in Brooklyn, she indeed suffered from various diseases. Moreover, she seeks distraction in bodily pleasures, like sex and alcohol. In this way, she tries to forget the all-consuming guilt which has been haunting her since her choice.

Secondly, there is the trope of the unfit mother, which has a third trope as a consequence: the disruption of generational succession. Although the choice Sophie is forced to make by the Nazi doctor is completely out of her own control, she still blames herself. That Sophie indeed feels that she has failed as a mother is clear from her answer to Stingo proposal to start a family together: “It would not be fair to your children to have me as their mother.” (Pakula, 2: 06:41). As a result of the Holocaust, Sophie thus outlives her children, which results in a disruption the generational succession.

Lastly, there is the motif of the suffering of innocent children (132). This motif is obviously present in *Sophie’s Choice*, as both Jan and Eva are sent to Auschwitz and ultimately die there.

As I have explained in Chapter 4, the melodrama – like the novel – is not considered the most appropriate genre to represent the atrocities of the Holocaust. The melodrama is, namely, regarded as a low genre –which can be explained by its classification as a body genre, together with horror and pornography. Moreover, the melodrama is assumed to evoke an empathic response in its audience. In the case of *Sophie’s choice*, this results in an evocation of feelings of torture and guilt in the viewer. It is, however, also assumed that a viewer watches a film with the eye on gaining pleasure. Consequently, *Sophie’s Choice* would yield a sadomasochistic pleasure, by denying or even enjoying the atrocities of the Holocaust. As this is, of course, unthinkable, it is important to consider Williams’ claim:

It may be wrong in our assumption that the bodies of spectators simply reproduce the sensations exhibited by bodies on the screen. [...] Even tear-jerkers do not operate to force a simple mimicry of the sensation exhibited on the screen. (Williams, 12)

In this way, the melodrama has a cathartic function: it releases tension in the form of tears. These tears, then, “become a surrender to reality, but it is a surrender that pays homage to the ideal that tried to wage war on it.” (Williams, 11). As a result, *Sophie’s Choice* does not find pleasure in Sophie’s suffering, it, on the contrary, calls attention to the atrocities that took place during the Holocaust and the devastating effects the event had on its survivors.

7.1.2 Composition

The narrative of both novel and film is built up of different stories, joined by a frame narrative. This frame story is told by Stingo, an older man looking back to his twenty-two year old self, who narrates the story of the events he has experienced in the summer of 1947, in the accompaniment of Nathan and Sophie. According to Patrick Badonnel, there can be distinguished five different stories within the frame narrative (24). Firstly, there are those of the younger Stingo (1), Sophie (2) and Nathan (3). Moreover, Sophie's and Nathan's story will come into contact when Nathan finds Sophie in the Brooklyn College Library and decides to take care of her. As a result their own separate story – a passionate and destructive love story – is constituted (4). On top of that, story 4 crosses that of Stingo, when the latter moves into the Pink Palace. This, then, constitutes the last story, that of a friendship –though a complicated one – between the three housemates (5). This last story is, as Hughes describes it, “the triangular relationship that carries the novel” (192).

As the plot, thus, consist of five different stories within one frame narrative, the question arises as to which of those stories is the main one. Joshua Hirsch believes that Stingo's story forms the main narrative (108). In his opinion, the story revolves around Stingo's coming of age. The fact that Stingo is the main narrator (*see infra*, 7.2.1) naturally pleads in his advantage. Badonnel, on the other hand suggests that the main story-line, as well as the subsidiary story-lines, can be chosen, depending on the judgement of the reader – or the viewer. He even believes that this judgement can change throughout the story and that, in this way, the story-lines can change from main to subsidiary (25). Evan Hughes, too, claims that Sophie's Choice is more than a novel – or film – revolving around Stingo pursuing his wants (191). He declares:

Eventually, gradually, the voice of the book [and film] becomes Sophie's voice, and it takes us back to her terrible wartime memories. Styron leads us into the novel through the familiar travails of a lustful college grad, but soon we are right there inside the consciousness of a Holocaust survivor (192).

This opinion is shared by Netta Nakari. She claims that, even though the story might seem to concentrate mostly on Stingo on its surface level, Stingo can be seen as a mere “trustee and a mediator of Sophie's testimony” (5). He, in other words, offers a frame to Sophie's recollections, through which her fragmented past can be pieced together. As a result, Styron's novel – as well as Pakula's film – can be classified as trauma fiction – and more specifically Holocaust fiction – rather than as a coming-of-age story of the young Southern writer, Stingo.

In conclusion, it is Sophie's traumatic past and its after-effects which inform the main

subject of novel and film – a conclusion which is clearly acknowledged by the title of the story (Lupack, 92). I believe this conclusion can be further backed up by analyzing *Sophie's Choice's* content, which will consequently be done in the following chapter.

7.2 Content

7.2.1 Narration

7.2.1.1 Novel

As I have explained in the previous chapter, *Sophie's Choice* is built up of five different stories within one frame narrative, in novel as well as film. In fact, this frame narrative is set up in the very first lines of the novel:

In those days cheap apartments were almost impossible to find in Manhattan, so I had to move to Brooklyn. This was in 1947, and one of the pleasant features of that summer which I so vividly remember was the weather [...]. (Styron, *Sophie's Choice*, 1)

It becomes clear that the whole following story is the recollection of the narrator's experiences starting in 1947. A bit further on the first page, the narrator directly addresses the reader, when introducing himself: "Call me Stingo, which was the nickname I was known by in those days, if I was called anything at all" (Styron, 1).

Apparently, the narrator is called Stingo, a narrator who will tell the story of his thirty years younger self (Spargo, 144). In the frame narrative, Stingo –the older, current version – is a heterodiegetic narrator. This type of narration will return throughout the novel in the form of prolepses. Yet, the heterodiegetic narrator most often shifts into a homodiegetic one. The narrator is, then, still Stingo, but he is now also a character in the story. This shift is clear in the grammar of the text as well, as it shift from present to past. This is indicated in bold in the following examples, which respectively have a heterodiegetic narrator and a homodiegetic one.

But Stingo I still was during this time about which **I write**. If, however, it is perplexing that the name **is absent** from the earlier part of this narrative, it **may be understood** that **I am describing** a morbid and solitary period in my life when, like the crazy hermit in the cave on the hill, I was rarely called by any name at all. (Styron, 2)

I **was** glad to be shut of my job – the first and only salaried position, excluding the military, of my life –even though its loss seriously **undermined** my already modest solvency. (Styron, 2)

There is, thus, a layering in the narration of both Stingo's – the older and the younger one. However, the layering does not stop there. There is one more additional layer, as Stingo

represents Styron himself, and this on the two levels: Stingo, the heterodiegetic narrator, represents Styron the novelist, whereas Stingo, the homodiegetic narrator and character in the story, represents Styron at twenty-two. Styron himself acknowledges the link, as he points out various similarities between Stingo and himself:

Stingo is not just the product of my imagination. Like him I was a reader in a publishing house, McGraw-Hill, for a few months. It was a boring and mediocre job among very pompous people. Like him I stupidly refused the manuscript of *Kon-Tike*, by Thor Heyerdahl, which became an enormous bestseller. And like him I was dismissed for my casual attitude. Because I refused to wear a hat. It was ridiculous. I have never worn a hat except when I was in the Marines, and I was not going to start just to please them. Also because I made soap bubbles in the hallways. Like Stingo I was in love at a very young age with a certain Maria, who, much later, committed suicide in a bizarre way: she drove her car from a pier into the sea. And the episode of my mother's death is also accurate, as is my feeling of guilt (Styron, *Conversations*, 244).

The autobiographical aspects Styron refers to in the previous citation are mainly integrated in the first chapter of his novel, which is completely dedicated to the reader's acquaintance with the young writer. By inserting certain elements directing to himself, Styron lends his story authenticity. Moreover, his story evokes a feeling familiar to many readers: "an embarrassment over the folly of youth coupled with a fond nostalgia for the youth that once was." (Hughes, 185).

The autobiographical elements in the story are, however, not restricted to those described above. In fact, Styron, too, has known a girl called Sophie, who was his attractive upstairs neighbor in a Brooklyn boarding house. She was also Polish and had survived Auschwitz (Hughes, 191; Tapa Lupack, 91). On top of that, she distracted him from his writing because of her loud sex life with an inhabitant from the building. The latter was, however, an unremarkable man and Styron never really knew Sophie well (Hughes, 191). So, here the novel clearly breaks away from the autobiographical facts. Other aspects of the novel originate completely from Styron's imagination as well, like for instance Stingo's guilt over his family's history of slavery (Styron, 244). *Sophie's Choice* is, thus, partly autobiographical, but mostly fictitious.

As I have mentioned above, the autobiographical facts increase the authenticity and, consequently, also the reliability of the narrator (Badonnel, 27). Moreover, as the heterodiegetic narrator has lived through all of the events he is recounting, he is deemed capable of presenting everything as it happened. Furthermore, Styron integrates certain historical accounts into his novel which again increase the narrator's credibility (Badonnel, 26). One example is the

introduction of the historical character Rudolf Höss. Höss commanded the Auschwitz concentration camp from 1940 until 1943, when he was *promoted* to Berlin and replaced by Kommandant Arthur Liebehenschel (Höss, 22; 197) In the novel, Sophie works as Höss's translator, until he must leave for Berlin:

I can't think what they imagine I've done wrong. Those people in Berlin, they're impossible. [...] I've done my faithful best and this is the thanks I get. This pretense – that it's a promotion! I get kicked upstairs to Oranienburg and I have to endure the intolerable embarrassment of seeing them put Liebehenschel in my place [...]. (Styron, *Sophie's Choice*, 333)

The historical facts concerning Höss – his departure due to a promotion to Berlin – are, thus, depicted accurately. Whether or not Höss was as affected by his transfer as Styron pretends, is, of course, impossible to know and is based on the author's imagination.

Another example of Styron's attempt to incorporate historical facts is that he bases himself on statistic historical data:

If the foregoing paragraphs with their accumulation of statistics seem, then, to have an abstract quality, it is for the reason that I have had to try to re-create, these many years afterward, a larger background to the events in which Sophie and the others were helpless participants, using data which could scarcely have been available to anyone except the professionally concerned in that long-ago year just following the war's end. (Styron, *Sophie's Choice*, 462)

Finally, Styron integrates several historical, philosophical or literary discourses on the subject of the Holocaust (Badonnel, 26). Styron, for instance, refers to the American writer Richard L. Rubenstein, known for his contributions to Holocaust theology: "Most of the literature on the camps has tended to stress the role of the camps as places of execution,' Richard L. Rubenstein has written in his masterful little book *The Cunning of History*" (Styron, *Sophie's Choice*, 285).

Finally, a last example of the ways in which Styron tries to increase the narrator's reliability is that, at certain moments in the novel, Stingo, an extradiegetic narrator at this moment, allows Sophie, an intradiegetic, homodiegetic narrator, to take over. This shift takes place when Sophie starts telling about her past in Poland:

In Cracow, when I was a little girl,' Sophie told me, 'we lived in a very old house on an old winding street, not far from the university. It was a very ancient house, I'm sure some of it must have been built centuries ago. Strange, you know, that house and Yetta Zimmerman's house are the only houses I ever lived in – real houses, I mean – in my life. (Styron, *Sophie's Choice*, 92)

A reliable narrator is, however, unusual in trauma fiction. In fact, trauma fiction, which often adopts the conventions of (post)modernism, is mostly characterized by the use of multiple and unreliable narrators (*see supra*, 5.1). Therefore, it is appropriate to look a bit closer at the issue of reliability in *Sophie's Choice*. First of all, even though Stingo allows Sophie to be the narrator of her own memories, these memories are still part of the former's broader framework. This framework, remains Stingo's subjective attempt at recreating past events. This goes back to chapter 4, in which I have explained that no rendering of history can ever be completely accurate. There is a notion of this already one of the previous citation, as the narrator mentions "[he has] had to try to re-create [...] the events" (Styron, *Sophie's Choice*, 462). Another example is provided below:

For although she blurted out to me the episode with Höss in such feverish yet careful detail that it acquired the graphic, cinematic quality of something immediately observed, the memory and the emotional fatigue and strain it caused her made her break off in helpless tears, and I had to piece together the rest of the tale later. (Styron, *Sophie's Choice*, 266)

Moreover, even if Stingo would literally recount what Sophie has told him, the accuracy of her stories can never fully be estimated. First of all, Sophie will again have created her own plot on past events, but even more so because her memories are traumatic ones. This insecurity is signaled in the novel itself:

My vision of Sophie's stay at Auschwitz is necessarily particularized, and perhaps a little distorted, though honestly so. Even if she had decided to reveal either to Nathan or me the gruesome minutiae of her twenty months at Auschwitz, I might be constrained to draw down the veil, for, as George Steiner remarks, it is not clear 'that those who were not themselves fully involved should touch upon these agonies unscathed.' (Styron, *Sophie's Choice*, 264)

Furthermore, as Spargo argues, it becomes clear throughout the novel that Sophie has been dishonest about her past more than once (153). In the following two examples, Stingo respectively warns the reader not to believe all of Sophie's stories and insists on Sophie's biggest *lie* – that her father was a hero:

As will be seen in due course (and the fact is important to this narrative), Sophie told me a number of lies that summer. [...] The passage a while back about her early life in Cracow [...] contained one or two significant falsehoods, along with some crucial lacunae, as will eventually be made clear. (Styron, *Sophie's Choice*, 115)

It was probably Sophie's most flagrant evasion (and one incorporating her strangest lie) that earlier she kept harping to me about the extraordinary liberality and tolerance of her

upbringing, not only deceiving me, just as I'm sure she deceived Nathan, but concealing from me until the last possible moment a truth which, in order to justify her dealing with the Commandant, she could hide no longer: that the pamphlet had been written by her father [...]. (Styron, *Sophie's Choice*, 287)

The question is, however, whether the story Sophie has invented about her father can truly be regarded as a lie. Possibly it can, as Sophie was afraid of people's reactions – and especially Nathan's – to the truth. But this story can, in my opinion, also be an example of narrative fetishism. Sophie could have created a heroic story about her father, because the truth about him – and about her cooperation with him – is too hard for her to bear. This explanation is also hinted at in the novel, when Stingo describes her story as *a fairy-tale* she has invented:

Thus when Sophie originally spun out her fairy tale regarding her father's hazardous mission to protect some Jews of Lublin, she surely must have known that she was not asking me to believe the impossible [...] and even though at that time I had small information about such things, I was not inclined to doubt Sophie, who struggling with the demon of her own schizoid conscience, chose to throw upon the Professor a falsely beneficent, even heroic light. (Styron, *Sophie's Choice*, 300-301.)

Yet, in the last line of this citation, Stingo claims Sophie has chosen to present her father as a hero. In the case of narrative fetishism, however, the person creating the narrative does not do this consciously. One can thus not speak of *choosing*, which is a conscious act. Hence, Stingo does not consider Sophie's story to be an instance of narrative fetishism. He, on the contrary, resolutely believes that Sophie has consciously been creating lies about her past.

In conclusion, there are many instances in the novel which nonetheless undermine the acclaimed reliability of the narrator (Spargo, 153). Not only is there a layering of different stories, on top of that, Sophie cannot be regarded as reliable, as she testifies about her traumatic past. Perhaps she consciously creates lies, because she is ashamed about it. But maybe, she rather unconsciously creates a different version of the past, in order to repress what has really happened.

7.2.1.2 *Film*

In the filmic adaptation of the novel, narration is essentially realized by the camera-work. Consequently, the camera takes on Stingo's point of view – mirroring the homodiegetic narrator in the novel. The heterodiegetic narrator of the frame narrative, on the other hand, is established through the use of a voice-over. This voice-over thus represents the fifty-two year old version of Stingo, narrating the experiences of his twenty-two year old self. As is the case in the novel with the heterodiegetic narrator, the voice-over returns throughout the film.

The shift in narration from Stingo to Sophie, then, is made possible through the use of flashbacks. In this way, the viewer is able to reconstruct Sophie's past. However, not all parts that are realized in the novel through a narration shift are realized by flashbacks in the movie. At first, the present-day Sophie simply talks about her past. Later on then, the viewer is literally taken back to Sophie's past, as s/he is actually presented with the events that occurred 4 years earlier. As I have explained before, the use of flashbacks is an advantage proper to film, inaccessible to literature. Its use will be discussed in more detail in chapter 7.2.2.2, which focuses on the issue of time.

The shift in narration is clearly shown in the camera work as well. For instance, the first flashback starts by zooming in on Sophie, until the screen is filled with nothing her face (Pakula, 1:18:57). When she starts narrating (1:19:30), she looks straight into the lens, after which the camera cuts to her father's eyes. Subsequently the camera zooms out and the audience is presented with a picture of Sophie during childhood, sitting on her father's lap behind the typing machine. The same technique is used for the last flashback: the camera zooms in on Sophie's face, after which she looks straight into the camera. Subsequently, the audience is taken several years back, to Poland. The remaining flashback of the movie, which represents Sophie's first encounter with Nathan, begins however in a different way. This time, the voice-over informs the audience that the following events go back in time. In this way, the difference between Sophie's traumatic and narrative memories is made clear.

7.2.2 Time

7.2.2.1 Novel

In order to discuss the aspect of time, it is necessary to look at the stories told by each separate narrator. The easiest story as regards time is the narrative told by the homodiegetic narrator Stingo. In fact, this narrative is told in a linear and chronological way. This means, Stingo tells the events in the order they have occurred.

Secondly, there is the narrative told by Stingo, the heterodiegetic narrator. As I have already explained, his story is one major recollection of past events. As a result, this narrator often returns throughout the novel by making use of prolepsis. This narrative technique is used to project onto the reader the further development of the story: "But I allowed myself to plunge on toward Coney Island, thus making sure to help fulfill Sophie's prophecy about the three of us: that we would become 'the best of friends'" (Styron, *Sophie's Choice*, 91). In *Sophie's Choice*, the prolepses often foreshadow "a future [...] fraught with dramatic events" (Badonnel, 25), as is clear from the following example: "Thus in the last months of 1967 I began thinking

in earnest about Sophie and Nathan's sorrowful destiny [...]” (Styron, *Sophie's Choice*, 261).

Other examples are:

This might have been a reasonable decision had I been dealing with a beloved friend who had simply let his temper get out of hand, but hardly (and I was not yet beginning to acquire the first flicker of wisdom to realize it) a man in whom paranoia was a sudden rampaging guest. (Styron, *Sophie's Choice*, 246 – 247)

But the fact of the matter is that at Auschwitz (and this she came gradually to confess to me that summer) she had been a victim, yes, but both a victim and accomplice [...]. (Styron, *Sophie's Choice*, 265)

Yet, the narrative technique which is most used in *Sophie's Choice* is analepsis, the opposite of prolepsis (Badonnel, 25). In fact, it is the most typical technique for the literary representation of memories in general (Birgit Neumann, 335), because of which the pattern is often used in trauma theory. Analepsis is basically the same as retrospection: “events that took place in the past are recollected only later, i.e., in the present, and are represented as the memories experienced by a narrator or figure” (Neumann, 335-336). Obviously, in *Sophie's Choice*, this technique is used when Sophie recounts her past memories:

When I was a little girl I would lie in the dark of my room and listen to the sound of the horses' feet on the street below – they did not have too many motorcars in Poland then – and when I would go off to sleep I would hear the men blow the trumpets in the clock tower, very sad and distant, and I would wonder about time – this mystery, you know. (Styron, *Sophie's Choice*, 93.)

The analepses in *Sophie's Choice* are not ordered chronologically, which is characteristic of trauma fiction. Instead, Sophie's memories are organized so that her past is revealed gradually and increasingly: during each analepsis, the reader's – and Stingo's – knowledge on Sophie's dreadful secrets is expanded. In this way, the novel builds up to its climax, in which Sophie's most horrible secret is revealed: the choice on which one of her two children could survive – and which one could not.

7.2.2.2 *Film*

As I have already briefly mentioned, in the film, flashbacks are used to represent Sophie's memories. The flashbacks are differentiated from the other scenes as they are presented in a different color. In fact, the flashbacks are shown in a black and white in order to make them look older. More precisely, there is a series of three flashbacks through which Sophie's past can be reconstructed. This is a rather limited number in comparison with the

novel, in which at least six chapters are devoted to the narration of Sophie's memories. Certain chapters in the novel, however, tackle the same episode of Sophie's past. In this way, certain chapters often extend on issues that have been mentioned in previous ones. In the film, then, these chapters handling the same memories – as regards time – are put together into one flashback.

However, certain chapters of the novel which handle different memories are inevitably combined in the film. As a consequence, the emphasis on Sophie's traumatic past – which is very present in the novel – is downplayed to a fair extent in the movie. This downplaying is reinforced by the fact that Sophie's first flashback is only shown at 1:19:30, quite a bit over halfway the movie, while her first flashback in the novel is presented already on page 92.

As is the case in the novel, the flashbacks are not represented chronologically, but built up to the devastating climax of Sophie's choice. However, the film does not follow the same chronology as the novel. Shortly after the beginning of the first flashback, for instance, Sophie's transportation with her two children is represented (Pakula, 1:25:00). This information is, in the novel, only given on page 448, after many other details of Sophie's past have already been revealed. Before this moment in the novel, the reader is in fact led to believe that Sophie had only one child – Jan.

7.2.3 Characterization

As I have explained in chapter 7.1.2, *Sophie's Choice* consists of five different stories: those of the three main characters – Sophie, Stingo and Nathan – as well as those that result from their relation- and/or friendships. To help understand the novel/film better, I will now briefly discuss these three main characters.

Sophie is a Polish, Catholic woman who has survived her deportation to Auschwitz during the Second World War. That she is not a Jew but a Catholic will turn out to be an explicit choice of Styron's (*see infra*, 7.2.4.1.2). After the war, she has moved to Brooklyn, where she tried to start a new life. To do this, she has to work through her traumatic memories, which she tries by testifying about them. Her behavior, however, indicates that she cannot succeed, which results in her suicide at the very end.

Stingo, then, can be split up (*see supra*, 7.2.1.1). First of all, there is the old Stingo, telling us the whole story. The reader does not get much information on this older, current version of Stingo. Secondly, there is the young Stingo, a character in the story of the old one – a character the weaknesses of which the old one is fully aware of (Evan Hughes, 183). This Stingo, a twenty-two year old writer native from the Southern United States, is, in contrast with

the older one, pictured extensively, so that the reader gets a clear view on his thoughts, intentions and feelings. This results from the fact that he is the homodiegetic narrator.

Finally, there is Nathan. He is an American Jew who claims to be a biologist at Pfizer, where he is working on a cure for polio. After the war, he decided to take care of Sophie, who was suffering from a multitude of diseases – a physical consequence of Sophie's experiences. The two start a passionate, yet violent relationship. It will become apparent throughout the story that the violence is partly due to Nathan's mental condition: he suffers from schizophrenia. Everything Sophie and Stingo thought they knew about him, turns out to be false.

Of the three main characters, Sophie can be regarded as the most important one, as the story revolves around her traumatic past and its after effects, on her as well as on the people around her (*see supra*, 7.1.2). As I will explain in the following chapter, the consequences of this traumatic past are extremely negative: not only is she haunted by an all-consuming feeling of guilt, moreover is she prepared to endure physical as well as mental abuse and ultimately seeks escape in death. This is due to the fact that Sophie has not been able to work through her trauma, but is still stuck in acting out.

7.2.4 Acting Out

Throughout the novel, it becomes clear that Sophie has not yet been able to process her past experiences. In fact, Stingo is the first one whom Sophie tells her memories to: "It should be made plain now, however – although the fact will surely be revealed as this account goes on – that Sophie was able to divulge things to me which she could never in her life tell Nathan" (Styron, *Sophie's Choice*, 176). By opening up to Stingo, Sophie could have started to work through her trauma, as Stingo hints at in the novel himself:

[...] there *were* circumstances and happenings in her past which had to be spoken; I think that quite unbeknownst to herself she was questing for someone to serve in place of those religious confessors she had coldly renounced. I, Stingo, handily filled the bill. [...] her need to give voice to her agony and guilt was so urgent as to be like the beginning of a scream, and I was always ready and waiting to listen with my canine idolatry and inexhaustible ear. (Styron, *Sophie's Choice*, 177)

There are, however, certain elements that make clear that this is not the case. Sophie is, in fact, stuck in the phase of acting out. First of all, Sophie's testimony differs from the standard posttraumatic flashback, as Sophie's memory does not return voluntarily, but is deliberately excavated by Stingo (Hirsch, 100). Indeed, the latter starts the dialogue, asking for the details of Sophie's past. Often, he even persists when Sophie does not want to answer. Instead of

listening when Sophie wants to talk – as he claims to do in the previous example – Stingo actually forces her to do so and asks for the details he himself wants to know (Lupack, 92):

'But there was another reason I would not have told Nathan about Jozef,' she went on. 'I wouldn't have told him even if he was not going to be jealous.' 'What do you mean?' I said. 'I mean he would not have believed anything about Jozef – anything at all. It had to do with Jews again.' 'Sophie, I don't understand.' 'Oh, it's so complicated.' 'Try to explain.' 'Also it had to do with the lies I had already told Nathan about my father,' she said. 'I was getting in – what is the expression? – over my head.' I took a deep breath. 'Look, Sophie, you're confusing me. Straighten me out. Please.' (Styron, *Sophie's Choice*, 433)

'Dead?' I said. 'How did he die?' But she seemed not to hear. [...] 'What *about* Jozef?' I persisted, a little impatiently. [...] 'How did he die?' I said again. (Styron, *Sophie's Choice*, 432-435).

The same is true for the film, in which Stingo, too, insists that Sophie tells him about her past. When he learns the truth about Sophie's father through a conversation with a former professor at the University of Krakau (Pakula, 1:11:50), Stingo confronts Sophie: "Sophie, I want to understand. I'd like to know the truth" (Pakula, 1:18:06). Stingo can thus be seen as an investigator figure, evoking Sophie's memories in order to solve the mystery of her past. In this way, Stingo makes it possible for himself – and the reader/viewer – to reconstitute Sophie's history (J. Hirsch, 101).

Secondly, Sophie apparently describes her memories with quasi cinematic precision: "[...] she blurted out to me the episode with Höss in such feverish yet careful detail that it acquired the graphic, cinematic quality of something immediately observed [...]" (Styron, *Sophie's Choice*, 266). As I have explained, the literality of memories characterizes the traumatic memory. The narrative memory, on the other hand, is marked by its freedom of representation. It is herein that resides the shift from acting out to working through, in the transformation of traumatic into narrative memories. In the film, the literality of Sophie's memories is displayed in two ways, depending on how they are represented. If the reader is presented with a flashback, the literality of the memory is of course evident as s/he literally sees what has happened in the past. If Sophie is merely telling about her past, Sophie does not look into the camera – even though he is fixated upon her. She, on the contrary, looks away as if she is absorbed in her memories, literally reliving them. The literality is also hinted at due to the difference in camera-work and voice-over between Sophie's traumatic and non-traumatic memories (*see supra*, 7. 2.1.2).

The different ways in which Sophie acts out her trauma will be discussed in the

following paragraphs. These ways are respectively guilt (7.2.4.1), sexual degradation (7.2.4.2), victimization (7.2.4.3) and death (7.2.4.4). First, I will focus on the representation of these issues in Styron's novel. I will start by discussing these after effects of Sophie's past on her present-day life and, in a next step, I will consider in which ways these after effects are mirrored in the other two main characters, Nathan and Stingo. Secondly, I will explain how these consequences are depicted in Pakula's adaptation of the novel.

7.2.4.1 Guilt

7.2.4.1.1 Sophie

One of the main consequences of Sophie's past experiences is her being tormented by an extreme feeling of guilt (Kerner, 126; Nakari, 2). Guilt is, in fact, a feeling which is often present in victims of traumatic events and as a result also forms a recurrent theme in trauma literature and film (*see supra*, 5.3.2). This is also the case in *Sophie's Choice*:

'So there is one thing that is still a mystery to me. And that is why, since I know all this and I know the Nazis turned me into a sick animal like all the rest, I should feel so much guilt over all the things I done there. And over just being alive. This guilt is something I cannot get rid of and I think I never will.'[...] 'I know I will never get rid of it. Never. And because I never get rid of it, maybe that's the worst thing the Germans left me with.' (Styron, *Sophie's Choice*, 346-347.)

[...] the word 'guilt', I discovered that summer, was often dominant in her vocabulary, and it is now clear to me that a hideous sense of guilt always chiefly governed reassessments she was forced to make of her past. I also came to see that she tended to view her own recent history through a filter of self-loathing – apparently not a rare phenomenon among those who had undergone her particular ordeal. (Styron, *Sophie's Choice*, 176.)

Sophie's guilt originates from different causes. First of all, she helped her father in typing and spreading his pamphlets, proclaiming the ideal of anti-Semitism. In this way, Sophie took part in the propagation of the Nazi ideology, even if she herself did not believe in it. Ironically enough, she –and her father and husband as well – will later become a victim of the message these pamphlets carried out.

During her stay at Auschwitz, then, Sophie literally entered the gray zone, in order to save herself but also – and perhaps even more so – her son, Jan. In fact, she undertook two morally ambiguous actions while living at the Höss residence. First of all, she tried to use her father and his pamphlet, although she despised it, to her own benefit:

You see, sir, it is like this. I am originally from Cracow where my family were passionate German partisans, for many years in the vanguard of those countless lovers

of the third Reich who admire National Socialism and the principles of the Führer. My father was to the depths of his soul Judenfeindlich. (Styron, *Sophie's Choice*, 329)

[...] she bent down and fumblingly plucked the worn and faded pamphlet from the little crevice in her boot. "There!" she said, flourishing it in front of him, spreading out the title page. "I've kept this against the rules, I know I've taken a chance. But I want you to know that these few pages represent everything I stand for." (Styron, *Sophie's Choice*, 335)

Secondly, she tried to seduce Rudolf Höss himself, by using her feminine charm. In this way, she attempted to convince Höss to send Jan to the Lebensborn program. This project transported Aryan looking children from the camps to Germany, where they would be adopted and educated by German parents:

I must move quickly if I was to – yes, I will say it, seduce Höss. [...] 'Finally, well then, Höss came back up the stairs. [...] I make this decision, that in some way I might appear attractive to him, standing there by the window. Sexy, you know. Excuse me, Stingo, but you know what I mean – looking as if I wanted to fuck. Looking as if I wanted to be asked to fuck. (Styron, *Sophie's Choice*, 282)

So, whereas Sophie feels guilty for – quasi literally – sleeping with the enemy during her stay at Auschwitz, the reader understands that she was mainly driven by the love for her son, which can be considered a mitigating circumstance.

It is, however, only at the end of the novel that the primary reason for Sophie's guilt is revealed: the forced choice of sending one of her two children to death:

[...] when the doctor said, 'you may keep one of your children.' 'Bitte?' said Sophie. 'You may keep one of your children,' he repeated. 'The other one will have to go. Which one will you keep?' 'You mean, I have to choose?' 'You're a Polack, not a Yid. That gives you a privilege – a choice.' (Styron, *Sophie's Choice*, 594)

Whereas the doctor presents this choice to her as a privilege, it is clear that the opposite is true. In fact, this proposition forms a very good, if not one of the best and most famous examples of a choiceless choice. Although it is impossible to choose between one's children, the doctor threatens to send both Jan and Eva to the gas chambers if Sophie does not do so:

'Shut up!' he ordered. 'Hurry now and choose. Choose, goddamnit, or I'll send them both over there. Quick!' [...] 'Don't make me choose,' she heard herself plead in a whisper, 'I can't choose.' 'Send them both over there, then,' the doctor said to the aide, 'nach links.'" (Styron, *Sophie's Choice*, 594-95)

This, then, is the moment when Sophie makes the decision which will haunt her for the rest of her life: “‘Mama!’ she heard Eva’s thin but soaring cry at the instant that she thrust the child away from her and rose from the concrete with a clumsy stumbling motion. ‘Take the baby!’ she called out. ‘Take my little girl!’” (Styron, *Sophie’s Choice*, 595)

Should the reader have judged Sophie for her moral ambiguity, s/he is set straight at the end of the novel, when s/he learns the injustice has been done to her. In this way, Styron emphasizes that in such circumstances as the Holocaust, one cannot judge people who have simply tried everything to survive, even should they have entered the gray zone.

Nathan, however, does not seem to share Styron’s opinion. As a Jew himself, he has created an obsession with the Holocaust (Hughes, 193; Kerner, 61). Therefore, he wants to know exactly what happened to Sophie during her stay at Auschwitz. Yet, by questioning Sophie on her past experiences, he reinforces Sophie’s feeling of guilt over them:

‘Tell me why is it, oh beautiful Zawistowska, that you inhabit the land of the living. Did splendid little tricks and stratagems spring from that lovely head of yours to allow you to breathe the clear polish air while the multitudes at Auschwitz *choked slowly on the gas?*’ (Styron, *Sophie’s Choice*, 253)

Sophie’s guilt then results in a constant striving towards self-destruction. Consequently, “violence becomes the metaphor not only of Sophie’s daily existence but of her dreams and sexual fantasies as well” (Lupack, 93). The nature of this violence is twofold: sexual and psychological. The striving for sexual violence will lead to Sophie’s sexual degradation (*cfr.* 7.2.3.3), whereas the striving for psychological violence will result in her victimization (*cfr.* 7.2.3.4). However, the retreat into violence will prove unable to compensate for Sophie’s feeling of guilt, which will ultimately lead to her – and Nathan’s – death (*cfr.* 7.2.3.5).

7.2.4.1.2 Mirroring

Whereas Sophie is the character in the story who is mainly haunted by a feeling of guilt, she is not the only one (Nakari, 39). In fact, the feeling of guilt is mirrored in both of the other main characters – and especially in Stingo, who is in fact haunted by guilt over two major issues. First of all, Stingo’s family history is one of slavery. Stingo only leads the life he leads thanks to the sale of Artiste, his family’s slave. Stingo is thus only able to go live in Brooklyn, rent an apartment and write a novel due to the money made by this sale:

You may imagine your great-grandfather’s anguish. In this letter to my mother he describes the ordeal of his guilt. Not only had he committed one of the truly unpardonable acts of a slave-owner – broken up a family – but had sold off an innocent

boy of 16 into the grinding hell of the Georgia turpentine forests. (Styron, *Sophie's Choice*, 35)

Years later I thought that if I had tithed a good part of my proceeds of the Artiste's sale to the N.A.A.C.P. instead of keeping it, I might have shriven myself of my own guilt, besides being able to offer evidence that even as a young man I had enough concern for the plight of the Negro as to make a sacrifice." (Styron, *Sophie's Choice*, 35)

By mirroring Stingo's guilt over his past with Sophie's over hers (Lupack, 92), Styron parallels the Americans' guilt over the treatment of Negroes before the abolishment of slavery with the guilt of Holocaust accomplices (Nakari, 39). In fact, he does this literally in one of the arguments between Stingo and Nathan. As is often the case, their discussion is rooted in Nathan's conviction of the Southerners as racists. In the example below, Nathan accuses the white Southern Americans, which Stingo is one of, for the death of Bobby Weed. As Stingo himself admits, this man was "one of the last and certainly one of the most memorably wiped-out victims of lynch justice the South was to witness" (Styron, *Sophie's Choice*, 85). Nathan reproaches:

I say that the fate of Bobby Weed at the hands of white Southern Americans is as bottomlessly barbaric as an act performed by the Nazis during the rule of Adolf Hitler! [...] Aren't you able to perceive the simple truth! Aren't you able to discern the truth in its awful outlines? And that is that your refusal to admit responsibility in the death of Bobby Weed is the same as that of those Germans who disavowed the Nazi party even as they watched blandly and unprotestingly as the thugs vandalized the synagogues and perpetrated the Kristallnacht. (Styron, *Sophie's Choice*, 83)

Secondly, Stingo feels guilty over Nathan's and especially Sophie's death:

To the guilt which was murdering her just as surely as her children were murdered must there now be added my own guilt for committing the sin of blind omission that might help seal her doom as certainly at Nathan's own hands. (Styron, *Sophie's Choice*, 619)

This citation, which is to be found near the end of the novel, again mirrors Stingo's and Sophie's guilt. This time, it is their survivor's guilt (Lupack, 92), rooted in a feeling of responsibility over the death of a loved one, which is being mirrored. In Sophie's case, the guilt primarily stems from Eva's death. In Stingo's case, then, it stems mainly from Sophie's death.

After Nathan's brother Larry had informed him of Nathan's dangerous state of mind, Stingo was indeed expected to keep an eye on Nathan and his behavior towards Sophie. Yet, Stingo let his own feelings for Sophie, and their resulting jealousy of Nathan, take over. As a result, he did not act quickly enough in order for Nathan and Sophie to be saved.

Nathan, too, is haunted by a feeling of guilt. First of all, he feels guilty when returning to Sophie after he has had one of his fits of anger:

Then at last I saw Nathan slowly sink to his knees on the hard pavement, where, surrounding Sophie's legs with his arms, he remained motionless for what seemed an interminable time, frozen in an attitude of devotion, or fealty, or penance, or supplication – or all of these. (Styron, *Sophie's Choice*, 508)

But, as Nathan's aggressive outbursts are the result of his mental illness and drug abuse, it is only a matter of time until the next spurt of anger follows. As a result, his feeling of guilt is never to last long and is rather superficial, especially in comparison with Sophie's.

Yet, Nathan is haunted by a deeper feeling of guilt as well: like Sophie and Nathan, he suffers from survival guilt (Lupack, 97). As a Jew, Nathan is morbidly fascinated by the events of the Holocaust. However, Nathan is an American-born Jew and has therefore not been personally touched by the Holocaust, as opposed to Sophie. One of the reasons for Nathan's bullying behavior towards her, a survivor of the camps, thus results from his attempt to compensate for his own survivor guilt (Lupack, 97). As a result, Nathan's aggression towards Sophie is often in direct connection with her surviving the Holocaust (Nakari, 19). Another result of his guilt is the universalization of the Holocaust, turning the event into a public and collective trauma rather than letting it remain a private one: "I say this as one whose people have suffered the death camps" (Styron, *Sophie's Choice*, 81); "As a Jew, I regard myself as an authority on anguish and suffering" (Styron, *Sophie's Choice*, 83).

The universalization of the Holocaust is, however, not completely wrong. It is important to remember its events and to fight Holocaust denial, as a mark of respect for its victims (*see supra*, 5.1). It is thus not Styron's goal to oppose himself towards the tradition of universalization. Rather, he refutes the exclusively Jewish' claim over public memory of the Holocaust (Spargo, 146; Lupack 102; Hughes, 195). Styron wishes to emphasize that the Holocaust has affected many population groups, besides Jews. His conviction explains his decision of portraying a Catholic Pole as a Holocaust survivor, instead of a Jew. Accordingly, Styron, through the character of Sophie, explicitly recuses Nathan's claim on the events of the Holocaust: "What do you know about concentration camps, Nathan Landau? Nothing at all? Quit talking about such places" (Styron, *Sophie's Choice*, 87).

7.2.4.1.3 Film

The depiction of guilt in the film is very different to its representation in the novel. In fact, the feeling of guilt is downplayed in Sophie, as well as in Stingo. Through him, Sophie's

feeling of guilt is mirrored in the novel, because of which the emotion is emphasized.

Sophie, to start with, talks about a speech – and not a pamphlet – she had to write for her father. While doing so, she claims to have encountered certain words she did not know the meaning of, like for instance extermination. In other words, she was not aware of what message her father was going to proclaim – and thus what she was helping him with. Moreover, whereas she helped spreading the pamphlet in the novel, she herself did not help carry out the Nazi message in the film, as it was only her father who gave a speech.

Furthermore, in the film, it is Höss's housekeeper who suggests that Sophie should seduce the camp commander, in order to help the Resistance (Pakula, 1:29:57). Sophie is thus forced into seducing Höss. In the novel, on the other hand, it is Sophie's own idea to do so. Two major causes for Sophie's guilt in the novel are thus completely downplayed in the movie.

One reason for Sophie's guilt is, however, insisted upon in the film: Sophie's actual choice between Jan and Eva. As a result, the melodramatic nature of the movie is emphasized. First of all, Sophie hints at her choice and its consequential guilt rather early in the movie, when she talks to Stingo about his mother:

‘You loved her very much?’ ‘Not enough.’ ‘What do you mean, not enough? What do you mean?’ ‘I mean, not enough.’ ‘Yes, it is what is so terrible about outliving those people that we love, I mean, it's that guilt.’ (Pakula, 42:52)

Secondly, the moment of the actual choice is dramatized more than in the novel. In the novel, Sophie is unable to see the panic in her daughter's eyes, as her own eyes are filled with tears. The reader, too, is thus unable to conceive Eva's emotions. In the film, however, the viewer sees Eva's being carried away to the gas chambers from Sophie's view point. The horror of the scene is emphasized extra by the sound of Eva's screaming (Pakula, 2:13:02). She screams multiple times, her last scream resounding while Sophie is shown in the present again (Pakula, 2:13:34) – as if the screaming still echoes in her ears.

Stingo, for his part, is completely redeemed of his guilt feeling in the movie. Firstly, the issue of slavery – clearly broached by Styron – is completely excluded from the film. In the beginning of the film, Stingo briefly introduces himself by telling the audience that “[He] had barely saved enough money to write [his] novel, for [he] wanted beyond hope and dreaming to be a writer. But [his] spirit had remained landlocked, unacquainted with love and a stranger to death.” (Pakula, 02:06) In the movie, it is thus Stingo's own merit to live in the Pink Palace and to write his novel, while in the novel, his stay at the Pink Palace was due to the sale of the family slave.

Moreover, after Sophie's departure from the hotel room where she and Stingo spent the night, there is an immediate cut from the room to the death scene at the Pink Palace. In this way, the viewer gets the impression that Stingo came as fast as he could, in order to save his friends. As a result, he does not have to feel guilty, because he could not have done more to save them – unlike in the novel.

7.2.4.2 *Sexual Degradation*

7.2.4.2.1 Sophie

One of the ways in which Sophie's trauma is acted out is through her damaging sexual behavior, which results from the inexistence of self-worth (Nakari, 38; Kerner, 126). As she seeks a way to escape her past in the physical pleasures coming from sex, Sophie is involved in a passionate relationship with Nathan. That sex forms an important aspect is clear from their very first introduction in the novel – Stingo's first encounter with them:

I was mulling all this over when I was made suddenly aware – in the room directly over my head – of a commotion so immediately and laceratingly identifiable, so instantly, to my tormented ears, apparent in its nature that I will avoid what in a more circumlocutory time might have required obliqueness of suggestion, and take the liberty of saying that it was the sound, the uproar, the frenzy of two people fucking like crazed wild animals. (Styron, *Sophie's Choice*, 42)

Moreover, when Sophie talks about her and Nathan's first encounter, she herself insinuates that their relationship may not be based on love:

Some romantic whim of mine prompted me irresistibly to ask if she had fallen that swiftly in love. Could this have been the perfect example, I inquired, of that marvelous myth known as love at first sight? Sophie said, 'No, it wasn't exactly like that – not love then, I don't think. (Styron, *Sophie's Choice*, 161)

The reason for both lovers to engage in this passionate relationship may, however, differ. Nathan's interest in the relationship might originate from his morbid fascination with the Holocaust (Hughes, 193; Kerner, 61). This is hinted at in the novel, as Nathan is fascinated with Sophie's tattoo - her Auschwitz identification number:

'What's wrong with me?' She still had the notion that he was a physician and regarded his silent, vaguely sorrowing gaze upon her as being diagnostic, professional, until suddenly she realized that his eyes had fixed upon the number graven upon her arm. [...] she made a move as if to cover it up, but before she could do so he had gently grasped her wrist and had begun to monitor her pulse as he had done at the library. (Styron, *Sophie's Choice*, 160)

For Sophie, on the other hand, the physical pleasure found in the relationship might offer her a way to forget her past. Even though their relationship is not simply sexually fulfilling and passionate – it is also violently passionate and destructive – it offers her consolation and a possibility to escape herself. As Nakari states, it helps her to “withdraw from her traumatized, troubled mind – and more importantly [...] forget her all-consuming guilt” (29). This claim is confirmed by the following citation from the novel:

‘Don’t ask me, Stingo, Don’t ask me why – after all this – I was still ready for Nathan to piss on me, rape me, stab me, beat me, blind me, do anything with me that he desired. Anyway, a long time passed before he spoke to me again. Then he said, “Sophielove, I’m insane, you know. I want to apologize for my insanity.” And after a bit he said, “Want to fuck?” And I said right away without even thinking twice, “Yes. Oh yes.” And we made love all afternoon, which made me forget the pain but forget God too, and Jan, and all the other things I had lost. And I knew Nathan and me would live for a while more together.’ (Styron, *Sophie’s Choice*, 422)

That Sophie finds a way of escaping her traumatic memories through sex is confirmed by various other instances in the novel as well. Firstly, during the war, when she was not yet transported to Auschwitz, Sophie had sexual relations with Jozef, a Polish man whom she apparently did not love: “I wish I could describe Jozef good but I can’t, don’t have the words. I was fond of him so very much. But there was no true romance, really” (Styron, *Sophie’s Choice*, 434). Jozef can thus be seen as a mere pastime in order to take her mind off of the ongoing war:

Furthermore, Sophie’s obsession with sex is reflected in the dream “so violently, unequivocally and pleurably erotic, so blasphemous and frightening, and so altogether memorable” (Styron, 492), described in chapter 13 of the novel. The dream sequence portrays Sophie’s sexual fantasy about anti-Semite Herman Dürrfeld in an explicit way:

She turned at his order, knelt on hand and knees, heard a clattering of hoofs on the floor, smelled smoke, cried out with delight as the hairy belly and groin swarmed around her naked buttocks in a tight cloaklike embrace, the rampaging cylinder deep within her cunt, thrusting from behind again and again... (Styron, *Sophie’s Choice*, 493)

First of all, the dream mirrors Sophie’s guilt over her complicity in Nazism (Mathé, 16). By insisting on the physical nature of the dream, Styron emphasizes that Sophie uses sex to forget about this guilt. Yet, the dream also reminds the reader of Sophie’s relationship with Nathan, whose actions often resemble those committed by the Nazis (Lupack, 95; Mathé, 16).

Finally, at the end of the novel, Sophie has sex with Stingo. For her, this is again a way

to forget her misery, as she has earlier that day confessed her most horrible secret – the choice she had to make. Indeed, at this point in the novel Styron explicitly states the point I am trying to make, i.e. that sex is a way for Sophie to escape her past:

Sophie's lust was as boundless as my own, I'm sure, but for more complex reasons; it had to do, of course, with her good raw natural animal passion, but it was also both a plunge into carnal oblivion and a flight from memory and grief. More than that, I now see, it was a frantic and orgiastic attempt to beat back death. (Styron, *Sophie's Choice*, 608)

7.2.4.2.2 Mirroring

Sophie's sexual degradation is mirrored, and even reinforced, by Nathan and Stingo. Nathan, to start with, inflicts sexual violence upon Sophie, verbally as well as physically. Verbally, he often accuses her of being unfaithful to him:

Bad enough you managed to talk me into continuing this disgraceful collaboration with a couple a medical hoodlums. But it's fucking *unbearable* to think that behind my back, you would let either of these mangy characters get into that twat of yours –' She tried to interrupt. 'Nathan!' 'Shut up! I've had just about enough of you and your whorish behavior.' (Styron, *Sophie's Choice*, 243)

Physically, then, he forces her to perform sexual acts upon him: "Suck me, you fascist pig, Irma Griese Jew-burning cunt!" (Styron, *Sophie's Choice*, 414). As is clear from the previous citation, these instances of sexual violence are, often linked to Sophie's trauma as well as to Nathan's own guilt concerning the Holocaust.

Secondly, there is Stingo, who is clearly obsessed with sex – or rather his lack of (Lupack, 101). First of all, his obsession is clear from his recurring sex dreams.

Moreover, Stingo objectifies women, including Sophie, regarding them solely as objects of his desire (Spargo, 144). From their first encounter onwards, Stingo has been focusing on Sophie's bodily aspects: "Because when I returned to the house I encountered Sophie in the flesh for the first time and fell, if not instantaneously, then swiftly and fathomlessly, in love with her" (Styron, *Sophie's Choice*, 53). Stingo thus *falls in love* with Sophie after *seeing* her – not talking to her – for the first time. Further on in the novel, the image that Stingo is primarily fixated on Sophie's physical desirability is even reinforced:

Despite past famine, her behind was as perfectly formed as some fantastic prize-winning pear; it vibrated with magical eloquence, and from this angle it so stirred my depths that I mentally pledged to the Presbyterian orphanages of Virginia a quarter of my future earnings as a writer in exchange for that bare ass's brief lodging – thirty seconds would do – within the compass of my cupped, supplicant palms. (Styron, *Sophie's Choice*, 60)

The same, if not a more severe objectification occurs with two other women in Stingo's life: Leslie Lapidus and Mary Alice. Both women only arouse Stingo's interest because they seem willing to satisfy his sexual needs. When it, however, appears the women do not want to have sexual relations with him, Stingo completely loses interest and languishes in self-pity.

7.2.4.2.3 Film

The sexual degradation which is clearly present in the novel is much less so in the film. First of all, Sophie and Nathan's first introduction in the film is not rendered through their having sex. Instead, they introduce themselves by sending Stingo an invitation to dinner (Pakula, 04:10).

Moreover, Nathan is pictured very caring during his first encounter with Sophie. Other than in the novel, he does not look at her wrist in the library and could thus not have seen her tattoo. This suggests that Nathan did not commit himself to Sophie merely because she is a Holocaust survivor. Later on in the movie, it is even literally stated that Nathan's obsession with the Holocaust has developed after meeting Sophie. In this way, their relationship, and the film in general, seems less focused on sex than on love, contrary to the novel.

Furthermore, Nathan never inflicts physical sexual violence upon Sophie. In fact, he inflicts much less violence on her in general (*see infra*, 7.2.4.3.2).

Also, whereas the novel provides several explicit descriptions of sex scenes, the film is much less explicit. The different sex dreams are excluded from the film as well.

In conclusion, the presence and importance of sex is severely diminished in the movie. This can be explained by the fact that a film reaches a more varied audience of different age categories and intellectual backgrounds. Consequently, it has to be less daring, less sexually explicit than a novel. Instead, the film insists more on the melodramatic aspects of the story, thereby trying to appeal to a broader public.

7.2.4.3 Victimization

7.2.4.3.1 Sophie

As is often the case in Holocaust literature, the Holocaust survivor is victimized (*see supra*, 5.3.2). In the case of Sophie's Choice, the victim role is naturally attributed to Sophie, as she was a victim to Nazism. Yet, Sophie's victimization goes beyond this period of her life. In her present-day relationship with Nathan, Sophie is a victim to his violence as well. From Stingo's very first encounter with the couple in flesh, Nathan's aggression towards Sophie is emphasized:

‘You’re a liar! You’re a miserable lying cunt, do you hear me? A *cunt!*’ ‘You’re a cunt too,’ I heard her throw back at him. ‘Yes, you’re a cunt, I think.’ Her tone lacked aggressiveness. ‘I am *not* a cunt,’ he roared. ‘I can’t be a cunt, you dumb fucking Polack.’ [...] She had begun to sob like a bereft child. ‘Nathan, you must listen, *please,*’ she was saying between sobs. ‘Nathan! Nathan! Nathan! I’m sorry I called you that.’ [...] ‘Nathan, don’t go!’ she implored him desperately and reach out to him with both hands. ‘I need you, Nathan. You need *me.*’ There was something plaintive, childlike in her voice [...]. (Styron, *Sophie’s Choice*, 53-54)

Sophie’s victimization by Nathan is linked to her past, though. As Netta Nakari claims, Sophie accepts Nathan’s accusations because she sees them as a punishment for her earlier misconducts (29). Although Sophie never did what Nathan accuses her from, i.e. betray him, Sophie feels that she deserves his reproaches, because of her misdoings of the past. That Sophie finds Nathan’s insinuations justified is clear since she reacts as follows when Stingo tries to comfort Sophie after she has been insulted by Nathan:

Clearly determined to resist my attempts to help restore her self-esteem she interrupted me, saying, ‘No, I know it was wrong. What he said was true, I done so many things that were wrong. I deserved it, that he leave me. But I was never unfaithful to him. Never!’ (Styron, *Sophie’s Choice*, 60)

So, due to her lack of confidence and self-esteem, which even turns into self-hatred, Sophie herself partly sustains Nathan’s abuse, (Lupack, 92; Spargo, 153; Kerner, 126).

This self-victimization is, however, not new. It appears that Sophie has always let the men in her life control and intimidate her, example of which are her father, Professor Bieganski, and husband, Kazik:

And I heard my father say, “Sophie will help you pass them out.” ‘And then I realized that almost the one single thing on earth that I did not want to be forced to do was to be *impliquée* any more with that pamphlet. And it make me revolted to think that I must go around the university with a tack of these things, giving them to the professors. But just as my father said this – “Sophie will help you pass them out.” – I knew that I would be there with Kazik, passing out these sheets just like I done everything he told me to do since I was a little girl [...] just so he could use me whenever he wanted.” (Styron, *Sophie’s Choice*, 298)

Apparently, Sophie has always taken on the role of victim, which is thus not only linked to her Holocaust experiences. Of course, the men in her life exacerbate(d) Sophie’s passivity and victimization, but she simply let(s) it happen. As she, at no moment, stands up for herself, Sophie, the eternal victim, can be regarded as an ambiguous character. On the one hand, she

has of course been very unlucky with the men she has encountered in her life. On the other hand, she has never dared to stand up for herself, as if she has settled for the position of victim.

Sophie's victimization is even extended, as she has, not once, but twice, become the victim of rape (Lupack, 97). The first rape takes place in the Höss residence, where the servant maid forces herself on Sophie. The second rape, which occurred in Brooklyn after the war, takes place in the subway, where Sophie is molested by a stranger. Both passages reinforce Sophie's victimization, as she is attacked twice without being able to stop the assault herself: two times, the raping is ended due to exterior circumstances.

7.2.4.3.2 Mirroring

Instead of a mirroring of Sophie's victimization by Nathan, there is a reversal. Sophie's victimization is namely a variation on the trope of the feminized Jew, as she is Catholic and not Jewish. Nathan, on the other hand, is Jewish. He is, however, not pictured as a victim but as a perpetrator. Indeed, Styron has portrayed "a non-Jewish, relatively atypical Holocaust survivor [...] victimized by a non-survivor American Jew" (Spargo, 149). As I have explained earlier in this thesis, the author has made this choice consciously, in order to refute the Holocaust as an exclusively Jewish trauma. There were, in fact, millions of non-Jewish victims of Nazism and this was, according to Styron, unjustly "not in the public mind" (Styron in Hughes, 195).

7.2.4.3.3 Film

As was the case with the previous traumatic after-effects, the victimization is downplayed in the movie. First of all, the two rape scenes are completely excluded. Moreover, Nathan is much less violent throughout the whole film. As Barbara Tapa Lupack claims, this might be "the most glaring omission in Pakula's adaptation", that "his Nathan [...] is simply not as ominous – and ultimately therefore not as credible – as Styron's Nathan" (97).

In the movie, Sophie victimization is essentially provided by the scene in which the Nazi doctor forces her to choose between her two children.

7.2.4.4 Death

7.2.4.4.1 Sophie

Even though Sophie tries to make up for her past by seeking sexual and psychological violence in the present, her attempt fails. Evidence is provided at the end of the novel, when Sophie – unable to work through her traumatic past – commits suicide together with Nathan. The way in which the lovers commit suicide exemplifies the link between their death and their guilt concerning the Holocaust, during which Zyklon B, a cyanide based pesticide was the preferred killing tool of the Nazis (Porter, 313):

I blinked in the dim light, then gradually caught side of Sophie and Nathan where they lay on top of the bright apricot bedspread. [...] recumbent and entwined in each other's arms, they appeared from where I stood as peaceful as two lovers who had gaily costumed themselves for an afternoon stroll, but on impulse had decided to lie down and nap, or kiss and make love, or merely whisper to each other of fond matters, and were frozen in this grave and tender embrace forever. 'I wouldn't look at their faces, if I were you,' said Larry. Then after a pause he added, 'But they didn't suffer. It was sodium cyanide. It was over in a few seconds.' (Styron, *Sophie's Choice*, 622)

Their fate does, however, not come unexpectedly, as many hints at the resolution of the novel are given throughout its reading, either by using prolepsis or by literally referring to the theme of death: "I need you like *death*", he bellowed in a choked voice. '*Death!*'" (Styron, *Sophie's Choice*, 55). ; "Oh, I love him so much!" she exclaimed. 'So much! So much! I'll *die* without him'" (Styron, *Sophie's Choice*, 57). ; "Who knows, I thought he might *kill* her'" (Styron, *Sophie's Choice*, 70). ; "Don't ... you ... see ... Sophie... we ... are ... dying! *Dying!*' (Styron, *Sophie's Choice*, 91). ; "He was as brilliant on Dreiser as he was on Whitehead's philosophy of organism. Or on the theme of suicide, about which he seemed to possess a certain preoccupation, and which he touched on more than once [...]" (Styron, *Sophie's Choice*, 223).

7.2.4.4.2 Mirroring

In the novel, Sophie and Nathan's fate is mirrored in the novel Stingo is writing (Lupack, 99). The book is based upon Maria Hunt, a tormented young woman Stingo knew and was hopelessly in love with when he was young. This girl, Maria Hunt, has however recently committed suicide. As this story seems strangely familiar to the apotheosis of *Sophie's Choice*, Stingo's novel within Styron's novel thus anticipated the latter's tragic ending.

7.2.4.4.3 Film

In the film, the amount of references to the death theme is reduced. Two instances are, however, literally copied: "I need you like death!" (Pakula, 06:02); "Can't you see Sophie, we're dying" (Pakula, 12:03). Moreover, the voice-over repeats the last citation. As the voice-over gives the commentary of the older Stingo, who already knows the ending of the story, this quotation gives the viewer an important clue: "Suddenly I shivered violently. I remembered Nathan's voice that night before: 'Don't you see Sophie, we are dying'" (Pakula, 21:09). One could thus conclude that Pakula again reinforces the melodramatic nature of the events.

The mirroring is, however, completely excluded, which then diminishes the viewer's possible anticipation of the film's ending. In fact, in the film, Stingo tells Sophie that his novel is autobiographical, describing his youth and the loss of his mother: "It's about a boy, a 12 year old boy. Yes, so, it's autobiographical. To a certain extent maybe it is. It takes place in the year

which is the year his mother died” (Pakula, 42: 51).

In this way, Pakula integrates some of the autobiographical aspects which Styron writes about in the first chapter of his novel – a chapter which is completely excluded from the film. Styron did this in order to make his novel more authentic, realistic and more identifiable for its readers. I, however, believe Pakula has a different reason for doing so. He, in this way, creates a layering as is present in the book, but on a different level. As Styron is the author of the book, there is an autobiographical layering between him and Stingo, the writer of the frame novel. As Pakula is the director of the movie, there is no layering between him and Stingo. By inserting the autobiographical elements, he realizes a layering between Stingo, the frame narrator and Stingo the character within the frame narrative.

8 Conclusion

In the previous chapters, I have examined in which ways trauma theory can be applied to *Sophie's Choice*, both novel and film. Although both media basically portray the same story, there are nonetheless several important differences between the two renderings.

First of all, the representation of trauma is clearly present in William's Styron novel. Although Stingo is the principal narrator of the story, the main narrative revolves around Sophie. Styron not only focuses on her past, and the way it is recollected, but especially on its after-effects on her present-day existence. It is indeed clear that Sophie has not yet begun to work through her trauma and is still acting it out. This results in an all-consuming guilt feeling, which haunts her everyday existence. This feeling of guilt, then, is acted out in various ways. To start with, Sophie behaves in a sexually liberated way, as she believes she can forget her traumatic past by turning to the physical pleasures of life. Moreover, she allows the men in her life to terrorize and objectify her. She finds their reproaching behavior justified, as she sees it as a punishment for her sins of the past. In this way, she herself sustains her victimization. However, as both of these forms of violence are unable to make her forget her past, she sees no other solution than to commit suicide: a tragic end to the tragic story of a tragic woman.

Many of these after-effects are mirrored in the other two main characters, Stingo and Nathan. In this way, Styron emphasizes the influence of Sophie's past trauma on her and her environment. In other words, he stresses that a traumatic experience, if not confronted critically, can control a person's life. In his novel, Styron thus portrays an utterly broken, shattered Holocaust survivor, who seeks relieve in every sort of possible violence, as a way to escape her guilt feeling. However, as violence appears unsatisfactory to compensate for her traumatic past, she ultimately finds escape in death.

In Alan J. Pakula's film adaptation, trauma representation is less present. To begin with, this is clear from the amount of recollections of Sophie's past. In fact, the novel proportionally provides much more, and much longer descriptions of her traumatic memories than the film does. Moreover, many of the traumatic after-effects on present-day life are downplayed, as regards Sophie, as well as the mirroring by Stingo and Nathan. First of all Sophie's guilt feeling – a feeling which is often very present in Holocaust survivors – is minimized. This minimization is obtained by diminishing the reasons for which Sophie feels guilty in the book. In this way, she can no longer be held responsible for collaborating with her father, nor for seducing Höss, as she was forced into this in order to help the Resistance. Moreover, Nathan is much less violent towards Sophie – sexually and verbally. Consequently,

Nathan and Sophie's relationship seems more based on love than on sex – unlike in the novel.

Some after-effects are, however, reinforced. As I have explained, these are the effects with melodramatic potential, which are thus exploited in the movie. Firstly, Sophie's feeling of guilt essentially originates from the choice she has made to send Eva to the gas chambers. Secondly, Sophie's and Nathan's death is underlined. However, because of the general downplaying of guilt, sexual violence and psychological violence in the film, their death is pictured more as a love sacrifice allowing the couple to be together forever, than as an escape from a tormented life. Indeed, the movie focuses more on the melodramatic aspects of the story, while the novel stresses the traumatic ones.

But why, then, has Pakula made the choice to insist on the melodramatic nature of the story, instead of focusing primarily on the tormenting effects of a trauma on its victim? I believe the reason can be found in the differences between the media of literature and film. As I have explained, the film media reaches a far broader audience than literature does. The importance resides not in the fact that the audience is bigger, but in that it consists of people of different age categories and social classes. As a result, film directors will try to adjust their work to the taste of as many people as possible. As I have explained, the melodrama is a popular genre. One can thus expect that the genre will be enjoyed by a wide audience. Moreover, sex and violence are not appropriate for each age group. This can thus partly explain Pakula's choice of minimizing certain after-effects, to emphasize the melodramatic ones.

Furthermore, film is more concrete in comparison with literature, a medium which gives its audience more chances to use its own imagination. Consequently, written representations often have a lower impact than visual ones and can thus be more explicit in their formulations than films can in their footage, which would sooner be regarded as shocking. This claim adds up with the common prejudice against adaptations, which are considered more vulgar than their sources (see *supra*, 6.1.1). Hence, this, too, can form a reason for Pakula to downplay the sex and violence in the movie.

In conclusion, the representation of trauma is clearly present in *Sophie's Choice*, both novel and film. However, Styron clearly focuses more on the subject than Pakula does. The latter, for his part, emphasizes more the melodramatic nature of the story. This difference is connected to the difference between the media of literature and film. Literature is, namely, intended for a more restricted audience, while film reaches a broader audience, to which it has to adjust its representation. Moreover, literature leaves more to the imagination. Film, on the other hand, is more concrete and will, consequently, sooner be considered shocking.

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