

Mapping the Narrative of Dispersion: A Study of Absolute Evil in *Sophie's Choice*

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to investigate the notion of dispersion and its repercussions in connection to the new world into which displaced people or slaves are thrust. The act of migration or dispersion of population is a process of spread of people over a wide area. The scattering or migration of people involves social, political, and economic causes. Dispersion of people consists of two states: voluntary and involuntary. The paper will analyse the major issues of moral, physical and psychological holocaust and how do dispersed people respond to it. The narrative masterfully connects two horrors: slavery and genocide in the Nazi-controlled Eastern Europe. The paper will deliberate upon the deep scars of Nazism and absolute evil on Sophie's psychology which leaves her completely hopeless and beyond recovery.

Keywords: Absolute evil, Dispersion, Holocaust, Nazism, Slavery,

Abbreviation: *Sophie's Choice* (SC)

Introduction

Sophie's Choice (1979) drew immediate critical acclaim for William Styron, and the novel has since been exposed to extensive scrutiny. The novella's dispersal aspect, on the other hand, has remained unexplored. The act or process of scattering things or people over a large area is referred to as dispersion. It's an important word in postcolonial theory that refers to all kinds of migration situations. The distribution of individuals in a population might be uniform, random, or clumped. The individuals are evenly spaced in uniform dispersion, individuals are randomly grouped in random dispersion and individuals are crowded together in clumped dispersion, which is the most prevalent spatial configuration. It is said that dispersion is caused by migration. The notion of dispersion is open-ended, and many philosophers have interpreted it

as a relocation process between two worlds, one of which is lost and the other of which is yet to be discovered.

The purpose of this article is to assess and analyse the elements that cause dispersion in the novella, as well as the major questions of moral, physical, and psychological holocaust, as well as how dispersed people react to such events. Taking examples of dispersion from William Styron's novel *Sophie's Choice*, the dispersion of Sophie- the main female character in the novel is explored. The story is set in the late 1940s and is told through the eyes of Stingo, a young Southern writer who finds a pair of tormented lovers: Nathan Landau, a Jewish-American prodigy, and Sophie Zawistowska, a beautiful and guilt-ridden Polish immigrant. Nathan Landau is her deranged lover. Nathan suffers from psychosis. The stereotypical maniacal New York Jewish intellectual who alternates between lunacy and sanity so frequently that he speaks in multiple voices. She was both a survivor and a victim of World War II's worst atrocities. Sophie is the protagonist of the narrative, and the gradual exposure of her past is the central theme. On a trip to the south with Sophie, Stingo discovers that Sophie and her two children, Jan and Eva, suffered from moral, psychological, and bodily problems in German Nazi concentration camps. According to Alvin H. Rosenfeld: "The Holocaust is a central issue, the central issue of the time," and has "altered forever our consciousness of evil" (43-49).

Dispersion and Holocaust Interface

Dispersion, one of the key disciplines in post-colonial studies, has both positive and negative effects and has influenced human life in unforeseen ways. The dispersion causes the 'home' to be physically and culturally dislocated, and the 'home' to be relocated in the 'host' country, resulting in bittersweet difficulties and tribulations. Displacement, also known as dispersion, can take place in two ways: voluntarily or involuntarily. While involuntary dispersion occurs as a result of natural disasters, political, social, and religious unrest, voluntary dispersion occurs as a result of a desire for a better life in a globalised world. Sophie has to suffer involuntary displacement in the novel and this forced dispersion lands her into the holocaust and trauma and she becomes not only a spectator but also a victim of man's inhumanity to man and survived holocaust and Hitler's takeover of Poland. Many people believe that the holocaust is beyond the reach of art because there is a gap between the dead and the rest of us that no talent can comprehend. As a result, they believe that the holocaust is the greatest mystery of all time. Only Auschwitz survivors

know what it's like to be in Auschwitz, Wiesel added. He believed that universalizing the holocaust meant misrepresenting it since it was a uniquely Jewish experience into which nobody had any claim to be brought. When questioned if *Sophie's Choice* can be considered a Holocaust book, Styron responded that it isn't in the conventional sense or in the manner that Elie Wiesel understands it. According to Styron, his novel is one lengthy testimonial of Jewish sorrow. According to Styron, the Holocaust is overwhelmingly present in the book, but it is more than that a metaphor for something else. The metaphor was found in the book's title, 'Choice'-'*Sophie's Choice*.' The metaphor was found in Styron's usage of Malraux's epigraph and he looks for that vital part of the soul where absolute evil collides with solidarity.

The story takes us to the recent past, presumably a year or two ago, to Sophie's fainting in the library, Nathan's rescue, and finally his attempt to kill her in a fit of wrath. The account of Sophie's narrative of what happened in the camps and her 'choice,' which forms the climax, is found back in the text. Sophie is a survivor of the Holocaust and Nazi concentration camps and was brought to Auschwitz camp involuntarily. She was caught smuggling meat to her country just outside the city. Sophie's most torturous life event, which forms the true source of her guilt, is the ironic choice she is forced to make upon her arrival at the concentration camp in 1943 for the failed attempt to smuggle meat for her tubercular mother, which Styron has reveals to Stingo just before her suicide with Nathan in Brooklyn near the novel's climax. We learn about this reality in the second half of the narrative, thanks to Sophie's flashbacks in her talk with Stingo, that she had not come to Auschwitz alone, but rather with her son Jan and her daughter Eva. It was completely “forbidden to possess meat” (SC 172). She says, “I freely admit my guilt of the minor charge which caused me to be sent here the business about the little piece of meat” (SC 336). Nazis used railroads cars meant for freight and animals to ship the people to the camp. She further recounts “I spend a lot of days and nights in that prison then I was displaced by train to Auschwitz camp (SC173). When Sophie entered the camp, she was happily received by S.S. Hauptsturm-führer Gerhard Fritsch: “you have come to the concentration camp, not to a sanatorium, and there is only one way out- up the chimney” (SC 476). He further added that anyone “who doesn't like this can try hanging himself on the wires. If there are Jews in this group you have no right to live more than two weeks” (SC 476).

Absolute Evil and the Traumatic Moment of *Choice* in the Life of Sophie

The real scene of the choice takes place at the end of a long and exhausting train journey, during which humans are herded in like cattle and sent to Auschwitz. When she initially arrives at Auschwitz, the doctor in charge of deciding who is executed instructs her to choose between her son and daughter, one of whom will live and the other will die. Both of them would be killed if she failed to make a choice. “It’s the lifeblood of the camp” (SC 477), she murmured. Another character who is a doctor by profession ordered her ‘shut up!’ She was asked to hurry and choose. “Hurry now and choose. Choose, goddamnit, or I will send both of them over there. Quick!” (SC594). She argues that she has two racially pure German-speaking children, perfect representatives of the Third Reich's Aryan policies, that she is a Christian-a Catholic, and not to be confused with the vermin of Europe, the Jews, who are ethnically impure. She pleaded that, as a mother, she can’t choose because it is impossible for a mother to choose one kid out of the two. “Don’t make me choose,’ she heard herself plead in a whisper, I can’t choose.” (SC 595). In the novel, the reading of mass murder is also highlighted while Sophie continuously lives in terror of the gas chambers.

Eva is dragged away to be killed as she selects her young daughter -Take my little girl, saving her son Jan for the time being. And that dreadful decision is buried deep in her mind, acting as a guiding force in her actions. There are no morally equivalent options that can be assumed for this choice. According to John Gardner, “The novel treats the familiar Styron subject, the nature of evil in the individual and in all of humanity. Brooding guilt is everywhere” (16-17). The 'Choice' for separation came from the owner, not the slave, even during the horrors of slavery. Because he was a valued asset, the slave was not immediately executed. Styron is a true representation of southern fiction, as the parallel between Negro enslavement in the South and Nazi concentration camps reminds us. Absolute evil, according to Styron, is when a woman is forced to murder her own child, whether she is Jewish, Russian, gypsy, French, , or anything. Styron saw this as a metaphor for pure evil as represented by Nazism. Real evil is dreary, repetitive, barren, boring, he writes in the book. This is what compelled him to write about the Holocaust from the perspective of the barracks, the tortures, the beatings, and the awful deprivation, because he claims he has no authority over Auschwitz. He didn’t want to make a violent pornography. While interpreting dispersion, Alvin H. Rosenfeld claims:

Styron wants to beat the Jews at their own game. But in telling us his story of the Polish girl who stole a ham and forever suffered sexual, moral and psychological abuse, he has written not so much a novel of the Holocaust as an unwitting spoof of the same. Reducing Hitler's war against the Jews to a literary war, he has turned the tables on his competitors and gives us the Holocaust in white face, de-Judaizing Auschwitz and making it the erotic centrepiece of a New Southern Gothic Novel.

Rosenfeld also believes that the alteration of these revisionist views, that all culminate in *Sophie's Choice*, is to consider taking the Holocaust out of Jewish and Christian history and place it within a generalised history of evil—or, as Styron himself claimed the titanic and sinister forces at work in history and modern life not just threaten Jews, but men in general. Sophie made sexual relation to get rid of anxiety and terror about the things, she disclosed to Stingo that “it was both a plunge into carnal oblivion and a flight from memory and grief” (SC 608). By now alcoholic and deeply depressed, she is clearly willing to kill herself with Nathan, who has already tried to persuade her to commit suicide with him. Despite the fact that Stingo proposes marriage to her, Sophie disappears, leaving only a note in which she says that she must return to Nathan. Upon arriving back in Brooklyn, Stingo is devastated to discover that Sophie and Nathan commit suicide by taking cyanide. The impact of Nazism is consuming, lethal, and cancerous physically, spiritually, and emotionally, according to the extensive assessments of the novel, but Styron has also provided a remedy to avoid the kind of evil seen in World Wars. "Let your love spill out on all living things," says Stingo in his journal, as a solution to mankind's total depravity. Styron convinces Stingo that the mandate to love all living things isn't something he came up with on his own, nevertheless:

It springs from the universe and is the property of God, the words have been intercepted—on the wing,

so to speak—by such mediators as Laotzo, Jesus,

Gautama Buddha and thousands of lesser prophets, including your narrator,

who heard the terrible truth of their drumming somewhere between

Baltimore and Wilmington and set them down with the fury of a madman

sculpting in stone (SC 630)

Conclusion

Sophie's Choice examines the historical, moral, and psychological ramifications of the holocaust through the tragic life of a survivor of Auschwitz named Sophie Zawistowska. The paper analyses the truth about her previous decisions, which are the source of her overwhelming remorse. As a novelist, Styron expertly conveys that Sophie's decisions, some of which she gladly embraces and others which she is forced to make, weigh heavily on her spirit. She has to choose her one kid over the other in the utmost state of helplessness. Modern 'globalised' world was the unpredicted and unpredictable outcome of an extraordinary conjuncture. *Sophie's Choice* is much more than holocaust fiction, despite the fact that it is classified as such. Instead of claiming to have solved the Auschwitz puzzle, Styron tells a compelling story about a powerless mom forced to choose between her two children. It helps people grasp how absolute evil may never be abolished from the earth.

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