

Fidelity of the Movie to the Novel, Twelve Years a Slave, Concerning Slave Narrative Elements

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Abstract

Black history and the legacy of slavery are closely connected and remain significant aspects of world history, particularly in the southern regions of the United States. The institution of slavery subjected millions of African Americans to bondage and the authority of white slaveholders. Their experiences have been represented in numerous novels and literary works. However, many formerly enslaved individuals also began documenting their own experiences in literary form. Through these autobiographical accounts, they contributed to the development of a distinct literary genre known as the slave narrative. *Twelve Years a Slave* depicts the life of Solomon Northup, a free Black man whose liberty was stolen when he was kidnapped and sold into slavery. The work was later adapted for the screen by Steve McQueen in 2013. This research investigated the slave narrative elements in the novel and its movie adaptation. The aim of the research was to compare the slave narrative elements in the novel and its movie adaptation by adapting Linda Hutcheon's 'adaptation theory'.

Key Words: Slave Narrative, Adaptation Theory, Racism, Narratology, Abolitionist Literature

1. Introduction

Originally published as a memoir, *Twelve Years a Slave* was adapted for the screen in 2013 under the same title by British director and filmmaker Steve McQueen and won the Oscar for the best writing adapted screenplay in 2014. Through his narrative, Northup presents a compelling story that resonates with audiences from diverse cultural backgrounds, extending beyond issues of race alone. In adapting the memoir, Steve McQueen chose to begin the film with a scene depicting Solomon and several other enslaved individuals working in a sugarcane field. This opening places viewers in an uncertain temporal and spatial context, contrasting with the novel, which begins by portraying Solomon's life as a free man. Explaining this decision, McQueen stated, "I wanted to throw the audience immediately into the deep end, putting people in a situation where they're scratching their heads. If we'd started with him as a free man walking around New York, then it would have set up the expectation of him going into slavery" (Fuller 22). To communicate the narrative effectively within the time constraints of a feature film, the adaptation employs techniques such as flashbacks and foreshadowing, allowing key aspects of the novel's story and themes to be conveyed in a condensed cinematic form. The under-analysis movie consists of well-known actors and actresses whom their great performances added more value to the movie, but the main part is on the director that showed the barbarity and dehumanization of the movie, but the period in best possible way in order to be appealing for a 21st century viewer. In spite of the fact that the novel belongs to 1853,

and its audience was people on that period, but the 2013 movie adaptation is made for the modern audiences and still is attractive for the viewer.

This study is devoted to two interconnected areas of study, namely adaptation theory and the slave narrative tradition. Within adaptation theory, the concept of fidelity remains a central and frequently debated issue. In this study, fidelity is examined in relation to the adaptation of slave narrative elements from the literary text to the screen. Although novels and films employ different modes of expression and communicate through distinct languages, they share certain narrative features that enable meaning to be conveyed effectively across media. Consequently, the study of a novel and its film adaptation involves an examination of the relationship between the two works, focusing on how the source text is transformed, interpreted, and represented within the cinematic medium.

2. Discussion

One of the central concerns in adaptation studies is the concept of fidelity and the extent to which a film successfully translates its source text into a different medium. Adaptations do not always correspond exactly to the original work, as changes are often necessary due to the distinct expressive capacities of literature and cinema. As McFarlane explains, “The verbal sign, with its low iconicity and high symbolic functions, works conceptually, whereas the cinematic sign, with its high iconicity and uncertain symbolic function, works directly, sensuously, perceptually” (27). Consequently, each medium communicates meaning through its own unique techniques and conventions. A notable difference between literature and film lies in the way information is conveyed. A novelist may require several pages to describe a character’s background, appearance, or relationships, whereas a film can communicate the same information almost instantly through visual representation. In the adaptation process, visual and auditory elements are added to the verbal dimensions of the source text, creating new possibilities for storytelling. Furthermore, while words on a page remain fixed, cinematic images can generate multiple interpretations through movement, sound, and visual composition. In *Twelve Years a Slave*, Steve McQueen makes extensive use of long takes to enhance the emotional and psychological impact of the narrative. By allowing scenes to unfold over an extended period, he encourages viewers to engage more deeply with the characters’ experiences. These prolonged shots create lasting visual impressions and intensify the audience’s emotional response, making the realities of slavery more immediate and memorable.

By converting a fiction to a movie, some changes and differences are possible which include structural differences and contextual differences. Density of detail in the book and lack of time in the movie are some of the limitations causing differences. Actually, density of the details in the text causes the disappearance of some details because of the limitation of the time. These differences may change from movie to movie depending on the director’s perspective in adapting. Deborah Cartmell and Imelda Whelehan have categorized adaptation in 3 groups:

1. **Transposition:** in which the screen version sticks closely to the literary sources, with a minimum of interference.
2. **Commentary:** where the original is purposely or unwittingly altered due to the intentions of the filmmaker.
3. **Analogy:** a completely different work of art which is a substantial departure from the original. (6)

In the first category, there is no important and meaningful difference between the novel and its adaptation because the filmmaker seeks to adhere as closely as possible to the original text. S(he) brings the novel to the screen. In some cases, even the dialogues and the speeches in the movie adaptation are the same as whatever is said in the original text. But in the second category, commentary, is the moderate one because it tries to convey the same intention of the novel with little changes that happen due to some limitations and choices. The third category is completely another choice, and it can be said that it is a kind of dependent allusion in which uses only some preferable parts of the original text.

Many critics and writers have examined the relation between these two genres and the possibility of adapting a word-based subject to an image-based one. There is no doubt that while this converting, some changes will happen. Some critics discuss the impossibility of a thorough adaptation, and some are into possibility of a complete adaptation of a literary text. Brian McFarlane is the one who has different ideas about adaptation theory. In his *Novel to Film: an Introduction to the Theory of Adaptation* he discusses the possibility of two investigations “in the transposition process, just what is it possible to transfer or adapt from novel to film; and what key factors other than the source novel have exercised an influence on the film version of the novel (22)”. In his way of analysis, he categorizes the elements which can be successfully transferred from one medium to the other one; from text to movie, and also, he discusses the limitations of this transferring. His main discussion is based on the narrative in source text, and the visual enunciation in the movie format. His main ideas are concentrated on narration. Hurst suggests that “the implication of McFarlane’s classificatory approach is that those narrative functions that are directly transferable should be so transferred. The expectation of an accurate filmic rendition of all but the most intangible elements of a source text is thereby justified” (175).

McFarlane deals with two concepts, cardinal and catalyser. The cardinals are the main parts of narrative “opening up the alternatives of consequence to the development of the story” (13), which are called the “risky moments” in the narration. So, there are some main functions in which the adaptation should fulfill them in order to be as faithful as possible to the original text. Beside cardinals, there are some parts called catalyzers which are supplementary to cardinals. Catalyzers are some supportive events in which their deletion while transferring from novel to movie does not hurt the main storyline, and the main themes and motifs are conveyed untouched. McFarlane believes that both cardinal functions and catalyzers are directly transferrable from one medium to another because they are independent of language (14).

As far as McFarlane’s claim is concerned, in *Twelve Years a Slave*, the distinction of cardinal function and the catalyzer is clear enough. The cardinal or the risky parts in the novel include slavery issues. Going through the details of the novel, Solomon Northup, his kidnapping and his freedom are cardinal ones in the novel which are pictured in the best way in the movie version. They are presented in the movie properly and with no change. But there are some changes in catalyzer ones, for example, Solomon had three masters in the novel but in the movie, they were decreased to two in which this deletion made no important change in the storyline. These catalyzers may be deleted in the movie adaptation, but their absence does not hurt the main story. In fact, it is not possible to show every tiny event or character in a movie format because compression of details does not let them to be placed in a movie within a limited time.

In adaptation mode, some directors try to remain as faithful as possible to the original text, but some others may manipulate some parts in which we encounter two features: loose adaptation and tight adaptation.

Whether in case of loose adaptation or tight adaptation, the director is making a piece of artwork like literature. “The attribute of all true art, the highest and the lowest, is this- that it says more than it says and takes you away from itself” (Leitch 19). It is the characteristic of art that takes away humans from real life and lets him/her be in a preferable world.

Considering loose or unfaithful adaptation, the director takes some part of the novel like characters or plot and creates his/her story based on the gist of the novel. In other words, these kinds of adaptations are faithful to gist of the source text and try to convey the same purpose of novel with no warranty to be faithful to the original text. In this kind of adaptation subjectivity speaks louder because the director’s view and intention are added to the movie, too. According to Elliott “Adaptations are often criticized for being unfaithful to their source texts because critics typically evaluate them from a one-directional perspective, comparing the film solely to the original novel and focusing on the changes that have been made. However, a more balanced approach involves examining the relationship between the two works in both directions—first from the novel to the film and then from the film back to the novel” (157).

Taking a close look, in fact cinema attracts high rate of interest among people, so directors use this feature to introduce new ideas- especially individual ideas. Individual ideas in movies which are adapted from a literary text, are feasible when the director feels free to add or delete whatever s(he) prefers in order to create his/her intention apart from the source text and may borrow some points or characters from the text, not necessarily all of them. Following the filmmaker’s intention, the images created will be different too. And in some cases, the point is different and that is the matter of comparing. “They (readers) are interested in comparing their images with those created by the filmmaker” (McFarlane 7). Different images and different intentions created in loose adaptation are in fact imagination and phantasy of the filmmaker not the writer of the source text.

A loose adaptation should not be understood as the creation of a new story. Rather, it preserves the core themes, ideas, and spirit of the original text while allowing flexibility in its verbal and structural presentation. Direct transferring does not exist in this type of adaptation, but it sometimes contains a deep meaning extracted from the original text. In fact, they are mostly perceived. “Central to literary film rivalries, fidelity to the spirit of a text is typically accompanied by an insistence on the necessity of infidelity to its letter or form” (Elliott 139). In other words, in this kind of adaptation, the filmmaker goes beyond the letters and lines, adding extra ideas to them, and pays more attention to the content.

Meanwhile on the other pole, tight adaptation, the movie is almost in parallel with the original text as if you are reading the book by watching the movie with no meaningful difference, and “audience have continued to want to see what the books look like” (McFarlane 7). However, a hundred percent likeness between the novel and its adaptation is nearly impossible due to some ineluctable factors that is a must in converting the mediums. So, in a tight adaptation the movie form is not independent of the original text and tries to move side by side not separated.

Despite some differences and complicated issues of adaptation theory, the movie under analysis is one of those to be a tight adaptation. *Twelve Years a Slave* and its movie adaptation are conveying the same themes directly with no astray. The movie tried to be as faithful as possible to its original texts, even the names are the same, and the setting and characters tried to be near to the descriptions given in the novel.

Another influential scholar in adaptation studies is Linda Hutcheon, whose work serves as a key theoretical foundation for this research. As one of the most prominent and productive contemporary adaptation theorists, Hutcheon has made significant contributions to the understanding of how stories are transformed across different media. According to her, “the most commonly considered adaptations are those that move from the telling to the showing mode” (38). As happens in *Twelve Years a Slave*, which is a transfer from telling to showing mode. She continues:

When most of us consider the move from print to performance, it is usually the common and familiar phenomenon of the adaptation of novels that comes to mind. Novels contain much information that can be rapidly translated into action or gesture on stage or screen or dispensed with altogether, admits novelist and literary critic David Lodge. In the move from telling to showing, a performance adaptation must dramatize: description, narration, and represented thoughts must be transcoded into speech, actions, sounds, and visual images. Conflicts and ideological differences between characters must be made visible and audible. In the process of dramatization, there is inevitably a certain amount of re-accentuation and refocusing of themes, characters, and plot. (40)

In adaptation realm, novels, dramas and even poems are included, but the first medium that comes to mind is novel. Why novel? Mostly novels consist of many pages, and they are in detail. Characters and actions are told in detail, which makes it easier for the director to make a movie. The director can make a movie based on the descriptions given by the writer of the novel. So, the percentage of getting false intention decreases. In fact, the writer makes the job of director much easier.

Linda Hutcheon further develops her theory of adaptation by proposing that adaptation can be understood both as a product and as a process. As she explains, “As a product, an adaptation can be given a formal definition but as a process – of creation and of reception – other aspects have to be considered” (15). Through this perspective, Hutcheon broadens the scope of adaptation criticism and encourages scholars to examine not only the final adapted work but also the circumstances surrounding its production and reception. She argues that neither the product of adaptation nor the adaptive process can be understood in isolation, as both are influenced by the specific historical period, location, society, and culture in which they are produced(xvi).

From the perspective of adaptation as a product, adaptation involves the transformation of a work across different media, genres, or forms. Such transformations may include the conversion of a poem into a novel, an epic into a modern narrative, or the retelling of a story from an alternative point of view. Adaptation may also involve ontological shifts, such as transforming historical events into fiction or converting factual accounts into narrative or dramatic representations. As a process, however, adaptation encompasses both interpretation and recreation. The adapter first reinterprets the source material and then recreates it within a new medium or context. Depending on one's perspective, this process may be viewed either as a distortion of the original work or as a creative act that generates new meanings and artistic possibilities (Hutcheon 7–8).

Within all these definitions and theorists' ideas, the main question to investigate in this chapter is the presence of the elements of slave narrative in the novel and the movie adaptation. How can a movie be

faithful to the text and how it can deviate from the original text? Definitely many factors affect this convey from novel to movie, which are going to be mentioned in the rest.

One of the important factors in movies is choosing the right actors that are effective in aesthetic and rhetoric aspect of a movie. Characters are part of a novel, and actors are inseparable parts of a movie. Essentially characters become meaningful in context not in a vacuum, for example in the 21st century, characters of the novel differ from classical characters in a Shakespeare drama. Filmmakers try to create unforgettable characters through images because a good character and his/her speech could stay in mind of viewers forever. As Kellner believes that “media images help shape our view of the world and our deepest values: what we consider good or bad, positive, or negative, moral or evil” (5). A great character with a great quotation circulates among the viewers and can last forever. The characters in the movie should match the characters in the novel including appearance, way of talking and so many other things. In other words, they should be exchangeable in a way that if you do not have any access to each of the sources, whether movie or novel, you would guess what kind of characters you are facing with. Eder claims about converting the characters:

Actors are cast and staged with enormous expenditure. A considerable number of characters are detached from their singular film narrative and spread intermedially. They are transferred to sequels or remarks and moved from medium to another: from comic to film, from film to theatre or to computer games, from literature to film and vice versa.
(7)

The movie includes many actors and actresses, but the main ones are issues to concern. One of these characters is Solomon Northup. Solomon’s character is acted by the black actor, Chiwetel Umeadi Ejiofor. He gave simply the best performance as the leading and main actor in the movie. A deep sorrow is always visible in his face, and his face is full of emotions and sadness yet even in happy occasions- although these occasions were rare. His eyes are like a sea beaten by waves- waves of sadness. If a person had access to one of the sources in case of Twelve Years a Slave, s(he) could guess the character of Solomon, because there is no significant difference between the novel’s Solomon and the movie’s Solomon. It is obvious that a person can evaluate these matters only if s(he) has access to both mediums, the movie and the original text. Although Solomon is the protagonist, there are many other characters to flourish the movie. One of the main black actresses of the movie is Lupita Amondi Nyong'o who plays the role of Patsey. She is also best chosen to play this role because of her delicate appearance and her calm face. In the novel she borne lots of difficulties which are shown in the movie as well. Her severe punishment by Epps is one of the scenes, she acted in the best way and so impressively. The other important role is played by Michael Fassbender playing the role of the dictator and vicious master, Epps. As mentioned before, Epps was one of the most cruel and harsh masters that Solomon ever had. In the movie adaptation, he has the same behavior as in the novel. He is always with a frown and always dissatisfied by the situation. In most cases, the director gives a close-up shots from the faces in order to be impressive and show the feelings through the eyes and facial expressions.

In film adaptations, elements such as appearance, speech, and facial expressions become crucial, as they function as primary channels for communicating the narrative and thematic intentions of the source novel. Among these, facial expressions are particularly significant, since a single gesture—such as a frown or a

prolonged stare—can condense what might otherwise require extensive textual description. This illustrates the expressive power of visual representation, which is not available in written form to the same extent. In *A Theory of Adaptation*, Linda Hutcheon also emphasizes the importance of visual and performative aspects in adaptation, noting that meaning in film is often produced through embodied expression, including actors' physical presence, gestures, and facial movements. Such elements contribute to how audiences interpret characters and narrative situations, reinforcing the idea that adaptation involves not only the transfer of story content but also the transformation of its mode of expression.

In transfers from a telling to a performance mode, differences of philosophy, religion, national culture, gender, or race can create gaps that need filling by dramaturgical considerations that are as likely to be kinetic and physical as linguistic. Facial expressions, dress, and gestures take their place along with architecture and sets to convey cultural information that is both verisimilar and an index of the ideologies, values, and conventions by which we order experience and predicate activity (150).

Another significant factor influencing the adaptation of a novel is the limited running time of a film. Because a feature film must conform to specific time constraints, directors are often required to condense the source text to suit the cinematic format. Consequently, certain events, subplots, characters, or descriptive details found in the original work may be shortened, combined, or omitted altogether. Since a film cannot accommodate the full scope of a lengthy literary text, alterations and omissions become an inevitable part of the adaptation process. These changes are not necessarily indications of unfaithfulness but are often practical responses to the formal and narrative limitations of the medium. A writer does not confront the issue of time limitation because while reading a book, this is the reader's portion to decide on the time; s(he) can refer to a book whenever s(he) wants and finishes it. But in a movie, this is director's duty to control the time and decide on which parts to show to the audience.

The level of detail in the source text is another factor that can restrict a director's choices in the adaptation process. In the novel, readers encounter extensive descriptions of the daily life of enslaved people and their working conditions, reflecting the author's strong observational ability. Northup provides highly detailed accounts even of his earliest experiences in slave pens, demonstrating a remarkable capacity for vivid description. However, such detailed narration can also have a limiting effect for contemporary readers. At times, the extensive focus on activities such as cotton planting and harvesting, as well as other plantation practices, may feel repetitive or overly descriptive, potentially reducing engagement for modern audiences who are less familiar with the historical context. Since the novel was written in 1853, its cultural and social context differs significantly from that of today. During that period, rural populations were larger, and agricultural labor was carried out without modern technological tools, making such descriptions more immediately relevant and meaningful to contemporary readers.

Despite this, Northup's detailed depictions remain an important literary feature, offering valuable insight into the historical realities of slavery. They enable modern readers and researchers to construct a vivid mental picture of the period and its conditions. Nevertheless, given that *Twelve Years a Slave* spans more than 300 pages filled with detailed accounts, it is not feasible for a film adaptation to include every element, requiring selective condensation in the cinematic version.

As mentioned before, this chapter's purpose is concerning the fidelity issue concerning slave narrative elements. Till here the ideas of critics on adaptation, and the differences of medium, movie and text, are studied. The rest of the chapter is precisely about *Twelve Years a Slave* and its movie adaptation, relying on the issue of slave narrative and fidelity. Dealing with slave narrative function in the novel and its movie adaptation, we should bear in mind that narratological modifications may occur, namely plot and the narrative which includes adding or deleting some parts and characters, changing the point of view and some other possible changes.

Racial issues are often associated with negative connotations, particularly when examined in relation to slavery and Black history. Racial discrimination, particularly in the form of segregation, is a central theme in both the novel and the film adaptation of *Twelve Years a Slave*. These practices resulted in the systematic separation of individuals based on race, reinforcing social inequality and exclusion. Williams defines segregation as "I am always a person of one color approaching a person of another color, with the absolute arbitrariness of color defining the whole interaction" (30). The mentioned white people in the novel applied segregation rules on blacks. The black had separate places to live, sleep, eat and whatever possible. Even the kinds of food served to the black were different and of the lowest quality. Within the ideology of slavery, Black people were falsely represented as impure and as a threat to the white population. Such perceptions were not grounded in reason but were instead products of socially constructed racial beliefs that justified discrimination and oppression. Solomon, as one of these blacks in his bondage years, had no shared place or event with the white except in one emergency occasion. He had a horrible fight with his master, Tibeats, and his life was in danger because the master wanted to kill him. He had slept just one night in an overseer's home to be safe then the next day, the atmosphere calmed down and he could come back to his work, and then after some days he was sold to a new nasty master, Epps, to avoid possible troubles. Beside this example, there were some other occasions that Solomon was in touch with the white. Solomon could play the violin gorgeously, so he was invited to several ceremonies to play the violin for the white. Truly looking, by playing he was laboring and obeying the masters. These racial issues and segregation rules are best portrayed in the movie adaptation, and the concept of fidelity is done thoroughly.

Solomon pictured slavery life including slave trade, slaveholders' behavior and slaves' deplorable living conditions. Like other events in the novel, Solomon described matter of slave holders and slave trade in stunning details too. At that time, slave trade was a big business with huge income and benefits. It became more beneficial by passage of a rule in 1808 which prohibited entrance of new slaves from Africa to the United States. So, the remaining slaves in America became more valuable and the traders had the best ground to get huge benefits.

Whipping and other forms of punishment are among the most persistent and defining aspects of enslaved life. Enslaved people were subjected to severe repression and physical violence largely because of their racial status. In this context, whipping and punishment became an ever-present element of plantation life and a constant source of fear within the slave system. Within such conditions, responses among enslaved individuals varied. Some came to accept this violent existence as an unavoidable fate, while others resisted the injustices they endured, maintaining their sense of humanity despite oppression. These contrasting attitudes are represented in both the novel and its film adaptation. Certain enslaved characters submit to punishment without resistance, yielding to the authority of their masters or overseers. For instance, on

Epps's plantation, each enslaved person was required to meet a fixed quota of cotton, and failure to do so resulted in punishment. On one occasion, those who fell short of the required amount were called forward to be whipped, and they complied silently, without protest or objection. In such moments, punishment is portrayed as a normalized routine within the plantation system, accepted by some enslaved individuals as an inevitable part of their lived reality.

The movie also portrays slaves' yielding as it is mentioned in the novel with no difference. The movie shows their silence and their surrender better than the novel, because in the movie silence can be felt as the movie falls in silence for a few seconds and let the viewer touch the silence. But to show the silence in the texts, some words are just told and definitely they cannot be as impressive as the movie. The opposite figure was Solomon Northup. He hardly ever accepted the punishments imposed on him in different situations. Firstly, we can see his resistance while he was shouting that he was a free man before, and these claims brought him harsh beatings. On the whole being a slave meant yielding to dictatorship. If a person did not act as they want, they were doomed to punishments whether their request or actions were logical or not. One of the examples is Solomon's case, where he had a verbal debate with an overseer about size of nails for using in building a house. He did not accept what he told, and in the following evening this matter brought him a harsh punishment which was about to his death.

So, we can see any objection was answered by a kind of punishment in order to stop the slaves. Definitely these punishments took away slaves' energy in order to prevent possible movements or objections. Solomon's objections and resistance can be seen in the movie with touching scenes. McQueen depicts the punishment scenes in a way that the viewer became accustomed to the violence. At the beginning of the movie, the whippings and physical violences appear too cruel to the viewers but gradually the scenes became normal except for some harsh ones.

When individuals are subjected to intense pressure, they may respond with overreactions, which can manifest differently depending on the person, such as stress, sadness, or anger. In the novel, this response often appears in the form of anger, as the enslaved characters are placed under extreme physical and psychological strain. Many are forced to work long hours performing labor beyond their capacity, while being denied any possibility of objection or resistance, and are required instead to obey their masters unquestioningly. In this context, expressions of anger function as a form of emotional release. The buildup of frustration and oppression leads to moments where enslaved individuals attempt to cope with their circumstances through silent or outward displays of discontent. Across various scenes, the narrative reveals their dissatisfaction with their condition, which is often expressed through anger, resignation, or muted forms of resistance.

Inequality within the class system and poor working conditions are significant themes in both the novel and its film adaptation. Social and racial hierarchies created a labor structure in which one group was forced to work under harsh and exploitative conditions for the benefit of another. As previously noted, much of the enslaved labor took place in plantation fields, where the work was physically demanding and often intensified by the cruelty of overseers such as Epps. On his plantation, enslaved individuals were not only subjected to exhausting labor but also lived under constant fear of violence and punishment. Their suffering extended beyond the working day. Although they required rest after long hours in the fields, their limited relief was often interrupted by Epps's unpredictable behavior. When intoxicated, he became even

more brutal and authoritarian, demanding obedience and entertainment from those he enslaved. At times, he forced them to dance late at night at his command, a practice that is also depicted in the film to highlight the disregard for their exhaustion and humanity. The oppressive conditions on Epps's plantation were so severe that Patsey, overwhelmed by her suffering, once asked Solomon Northup to end her life, believing death to be the only escape from her unbearable existence and a means of attaining peace.

Women are inseparable part of the story, but depiction of their characters differ from the novel and its adaptation. Solomon Northup tried to show every aspect of their life, but McQueen has censored some of the positive and effective parts related to women. It seems that women in the movie are summarized in characters of Eliza and Patsey, and the rest do not have that much active role. For example, the case of Celeste is not mentioned in the movie. Celeste was one of the slaves who hid in the swamp in order to be away from his master's wild punishments. She was there almost three months. In fact, her deed was a kind of resistance against slavery but is not shown in the movie. There is a shared triangle in the novel and its movie adaptation, and that is the triangle of Patsey, Mr. Epps, and Mrs. Epps. Unconditionally, both Mr. Epps and Mrs. Epps wanted to have Patsey's body but for different purposes. Epps was abusing Patsey as sex slave and she was a serious threat to his wife. On the other hand, Mrs. Epps wanted Patsey's body too but for punishment and torturing because she had understood that Patsey was a dirty threat to her life. This triangle of jealousy and abuse is best shown in the movie too, as the viewer notices the wrathful and revengeful look of Mrs. Epps toward poor Patsey. Despite all those brutal behaviors from Epps and his wife, she had a delight for life and kept up her spirit. Overall, Patsey can stand for many other girls in slavery period who were abused by their masters and were one of the most hateful people to their mistress. They had no right to protest. As it is said before, Solomon's story is about limited people but can stand for many and show the sufferings of many.

There was no meaningful difference between men and women in slavery system especially in laboring part. On the whole, the gender did not influence the amount of work done to the masters. It is supposed that women should work in lighter works, as they are weaker than men, but in almost all situations they were working along with men in the fields. Just some rare masters let women slaves to work in lighter labors. One of these rare examples was master Ford. He bought Eliza and let her work at home with mistress Ford and not to go to plantations with men. But the mistress could not bear her due to her overwhelming sadness. She was separated from her children and was mourning because of this loss whole the novel. When Ford was buying Eliza, he asked the slave trader many times not to separate a mother from her child, but they were all in vain. The slave trader was thinking about his benefits not of a person's feeling. He mentioned that he could acquire more benefits through Eliza's daughter, as she was a beautiful young girl. So, the suffering was not different for a male and a female.

Freedom is one of the terms that sticks to slavery because they are in fact binary oppositions. In concerning the movie's fidelity to the novel, freedom is one of the terms that is portrayed well. Getting free was in Solomon's mind from the very beginning day of his capture. Firstly, he made some plans with his fellow slaves to run away when the slaveholder was carrying them from a pen to a new island and leading to the southern regions. The journey was by the sea, so they decided to control the crew and lead the ship to a nearby island in order to run away. But a sudden death of one of the black fellows canceled the plan. Then by transferring to the fields, his dream of freedom became more impossible. During his stay on the fields,

there were two major events related to his freedom in which the second event caused his freedom. He met a white man named Armsby at Epps' plantation and started to tell his story to him. Solomon asked for help from Armsby to deliver some letters to his friends and family members. Solomon gave all his saved money to him in order to do a favor for him, but the next day Armsby betrayed him, and told the whole story to Epps. Solomon could survive in this situation by saying that Armsby wanted to be the overseer because of that he told some lies. The next important occasion was his meeting with Bass. Solomon dared to tell his story again and ask for help, and this time he could succeed. Bass was fascinated with his story that how a free man could bear this much harshness and bad behaviors. Finally, Bass could help in setting him free. In fact, freedom was something taken away from Solomon Northup, and all he was trying, was to get back his freedom. Both figures, Bass and Armsby, are present in the movie adaptation and with the same characteristics. Linda Hutcheon believed that adaptation can be a process or a product. As these elements are shown in parallel with the novel so it can be considered as process in this aspect according to Linda Hutcheon.

One of the recurring motifs represented effectively in both the novel and its film adaptation is the depiction of prayer and religious gatherings. Enslaved individuals and their masters occasionally participated in collective prayer sessions, during which passages from the Bible were read, often by the slaveholders themselves. These gatherings emphasized themes of devotion, obedience, and gratitude toward God. Even harsh slaveholders such as Epps are shown organizing such meetings and reading scripture to the enslaved people under their control. However, the purpose and function of these religious gatherings varied depending on the slaveholder. In the case of Ford, for instance, prayer meetings were intended to encourage moral conduct and foster a more humane and disciplined environment among the enslaved population. As Northup stated that "he sought to inculcate in our minds feelings of kindness towards each other, of dependence upon God - setting forth the rewards of promised unto those who lead an upright and prayerful life" (97). Actually, his behavior was different from all slaveholders mentioned in the novel, for he was a gentle and kind man. Some believed that a man like Ford was not the suitable one to own niggers due to his generous manners. In contrast, Epps represents a starkly different approach compared to Ford. His religious gatherings were not primarily intended as moral or spiritual guidance but were instead motivated by his fear that divine punishment might affect his agricultural productivity. He believed that if he did not maintain religious observance, God might curse his plantation and damage his crop yields. As a result, his prayer meetings were closely linked to economic anxiety rather than genuine concern for the spiritual well-being of the enslaved.

A similar attitude can be observed in the case of Master Tanner, who temporarily employed Solomon Northup from Tibeats. On one occasion, while reading the Bible to the enslaved workers, Tanner encountered passages referring to punishment. He attempted to interpret and apply these biblical references as justification for disciplining the enslaved individuals, using scripture to reinforce the legitimacy of punishment and control.

When he came to 47th verse, he looked deliberately around him and continued- "And that servant which knew his lord's will,"- here he paused looking around more deliberately than before, and again proceeded- "which knew his lord's will and prepared

not himself- here was another pause- “prepared not himself, neither did according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes.”

“D’ye hear that?” demanded Peter, emphatically. “Stripes”, he repeated, slowly and distinctly, taking off his spectacles, preparatory to making a few remarks.

“That nigger that don’t take care- that don’t obey his lord- that’s his master- d’ye see?- that ’ere nigger shall be beaten with many stripes. Now, ‘many’ signifies great many- forty, a hundred, a hundred and fifty lashes. That’s Scriptor. (128)

Slaveholders often believed they had the right to physically punish enslaved people, treating them as property over whom they had complete control. In this framework, the basic human rights of Black individuals were systematically ignored. Religious discourse was frequently used to legitimize such practices, with slaveholders drawing on selective interpretations of the Bible to justify acts of violence and oppression. As a result, their actions were rarely questioned within the dominant social order, and any criticism of slavery could be countered through religious justification. In many cases, references to scripture were employed to defend and normalize the system of slavery, reinforcing its perceived moral and social legitimacy despite its inherent brutality.

If slave owners were following the Bible, so they had to be good people themselves and make no sin. The result was vice versa for most of them. It shows how religion and religious matters can be used in positive and negative ways based on person’s benefit. In fact, they used religious ways to show that what they did was acceptable. They used them to impose some definite ideas on people and penetrate through their minds by this way. In the past, religious issues were so strict and most of the people believed them from bottom of their heart. People were supposed to accept religious matters without questioning them because at that time the churches were one of the dominant organizations that had power on people. Every event in society was tried to be related to religious issues, and these rules determined the quality of people’s lives. Perhaps religion was a way to control people’s lives by some predetermined notions. As it is mentioned, the religious matters in the novel are told in detail, and even the reader can refer to the exact sentences told in the Bible or other holy books. The same issue is shown in the movie in a clever way as well. McQueen pictured the religious gatherings as magnificent gatherings in which slaves and the family members were all present in all the sessions and wholly respect what were told in the Bible.

In addition to Biblical quotes, there were some songs that the slaves were used to sing on the fields while working. These songs were sung while working, and a leader sang one part, and the other slaves repeated them. Slave songs were part of tradition which passed down through generations. They were very common during working times. Singing could decrease the repression and pressure the slaves were standing, and also the song could make them work with a rhythm and fast as possible. Music and songs have magical power in soothing human pain, and slave holders and masters were using this method in order to involve the slaves in work. In fact, they were the strategies to control the slaves. The below is one of the slave songs appeared in the novel which is part of a song named “A Refrain of the Red River Plantation”:

Harper’s creek and roarin’ ribber,
Thar, my dear, we’ll live forebber;
Den we’ll go to the Ingin nation,
All I want in dis creation,

Is pretty little wife and big plantation.
Chorus. Up dat oak and down dat ribber,
Two overseers and one little nigger
Who's been here since I've been gone?
Pretty little gal wid a josey on.
Hog Eye!
Old Hof Eye!
And Hosey too! (219)

There are so many books which collected the songs, one of them is *Slave Songs of the United States*. The songs sung in different situations were different, for example songs on plantations were different from the songs in mines or railroads. They had different contexts which were categorized based on the place where they were sung. Songs' subject was mostly about praising the Lord or asking for help from the Lord and were sung mostly in times of difficult labor. Moreover, some songs were to celebrate especial events such as funerals or Sabbaths. Adding songs to the big screen was important to McQueen because a movie is moving images plus sounds. The movie adaptation of the novel pictures the scenes related to singing. It shows how slaves were working hard in the fields and simultaneously sang the songs with rhythm and in groups.

Singing and music are one of the important features of *Twelve Years a Slave*. The reader can feel the presence of music in several parts of the novel. The protagonist of the novel is one of the characters to be involved with music and playing. Firstly, he was a violin player and was invited to play in a circus in which was a trap to sell him to slave traders. Later on, in his capture period of twelve years, he was given a violin by his master, and occasionally he played violin in several ceremonies. His violin was a source of calmness for him, and it could soothe him. We can observe that Solomon chose to play violin in his solitude, and when he was missing his family. The movie could best portray the scene of playing the violin in the times that Solomon was alone. The viewer can sympathize while tears came down on Solomon's face because of his loneliness. An image-based media can show sadness better than thousands of words and can be more impressive too.

3. Conclusion

The above paragraphs examine the possible changes and differences that happened while adapting *Twelve Years a Slave* into the movie concerning the elements of slave narrative. There is no doubt that showing is different from telling, so that differences in adapting process are undeniable. This study is based on Linda Hutcheon's theory of adaptation categorizing adaptation as a product or a process.

As a product, the director can involve producing any new factor in the movie as a new tone, new character and anything that is not mentioned in the novel. Producing also can be deleting the factors mentioned in the text. The purpose of the adaptation as product, is to be faithful to the spirit of the original text. A director may manipulate the original text in a way that it would be difficult to connect the movie and its adaptation to each other, but on the whole, there is at least one shared point between the text and its movie adaptation. Meanwhile in adaptation as a process, the novel and the movie go in parallel having shared points.

Within all these definitions, *Twelve Years a Slave* can be mentioned as a process in field of adaptation according to Hutcheon, because nearly all the factors related to slave narrative are transferred to the movie. With an eye to slave narrative, its issues include race and racism, inequality, injustice, slavery system and case of black slave women. These issues are all conveyed to the movie as they were in the novel with little change. Especially the issues of race and racism are best shown in the movie, as the director, Steve McQueen, himself is a black one, and can feel the black and their history better. Injustice is also best portrayed in the movie. How slaves were behaved with strict rules and harsh punishments are the best samples to show injustice in society. As a process, the movie adaptation of *Twelve Years a Slave* is in the same line as novel in depicting slavery system. In fact, the purpose of both the movie and the novel were, to show slavery system to let the audience feel what slavery was, and this movie was a try to show just an angle of slavery. The women were also part of this slavery system, and the novel described them and their life with great detail. And the movie adaptation tried to be as close as possible to the descriptions of the novel, and in most cases is successful, but some changes happened as deletion of one of the women characters or weakening the roles of women characters. But these changes did not make affect the intention of the novel or did not produce another piece of art.

However, as the comparison between the novel and the film demonstrates, adaptation cannot be confined to a single category such as “process” or “product.” In my view, *Twelve Years a Slave* cannot be understood exclusively through either of these labels. A film adaptation is not a continuous act of role-playing; rather, it is grounded in specific events, facts, and narrative elements drawn from the source text. Therefore, instead of categorizing an entire film as either process or product, it is more effective to analyze it in separate units. These units may be organized around key narrative moments in the novel, such as its climax or other significant events, and examined individually. This method allows for a more nuanced understanding of adaptation, since different sections of the same film may function differently. For instance, some scenes in *Twelve Years a Slave* are closely transferred from the novel with minimal alteration, such as Patsey’s character and her brutal whipping, as well as Solomon’s experiences. These elements can be understood as closer to a process of adaptation, as they largely reproduce the source material without generating entirely new narrative meaning, but rather translate it into cinematic form.

However, when the film is divided into separate segments, other scenes may be interpreted as more clearly “product”-oriented. One example is the sequence involving Solomon and his companions’ escape plan while aboard a ship bound for New Orleans. In the novel, Solomon, Arthur, and Robert develop a detailed strategy to seize control of the vessel and redirect it to a different destination. Robert becomes ill and dies of smallpox shortly before the plan can be executed. In the film, however, this entire episode is altered: there is no escape plan, and the enslaved characters are portrayed as largely passive. Instead, Robert is killed after attempting to stop the sexual assault of Eliza by a white man, and his body is later thrown into the sea. This significant alteration creates a different narrative outcome and emotional emphasis, making this segment more of a re-creation than a direct translation of the source. In this sense, it can be considered closer to a “product” of adaptation, as it generates a new meaning while still maintaining certain thematic connections with the original. Consequently, different parts of the same film may function differently within adaptation theory when examined individually, supporting the argument that adaptation is a complex and multifaceted process.

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