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**Slave Narratives as part of the American Literary
Canon; *12 Years a Slave* From the Book to the Movie**

*An Extended Essay Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirement for
a Master's Degree in Anglo-Saxon Literature and Civilisation*

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Dedication

I would like to start my dedication by a special thank you to my Mom and Dad who helped me a lot in reaching my dreams and also for their guidance my Allah bless them, also I would like to thank my lovely sister, and my two little twin brothers for annoying me all the time but still love them both.

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I will be grateful to each and every one of you

Thank you so much

Mohamed

Dedication

In the vastness of space and immensity of time. I dedicate this work to my beloved angel; my mother “may Allah keep her for me” and my dad “may his soul rest in peace”, also to my brothers Mohamed, Nouredine, Ibrahim and my only sister wishing them a prosperous life.

To my grandmother and grandfather who pushed me with their sincere prayers and best wishes.

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Abstract

This research work will deal with four main points; slavery, slave narratives, Solomon Northup's *12 Years a Slave* and Steve McQueen's film version. Slavery in America was an issue of debate and still is. There is no fixed date that tells the beginning of slavery in America, but it surely began by the 17th century in the American colonies. Slaves developed their own traditions, culture and literature, and gave birth to a new genre that is Slave Narratives. The story under focus is that of Solomon Northup entitled *12 Years a Slave*; the story of a free black man from New York, tricked by two men who kidnapped him into slavery for 12 years. This story inspired the British filmmaker Steve McQueen to adapt it into a movie, and was able to do it with the help of his screen writer John Ridley; they turned the memoir into a worldwide famous movie thanks to its faithfulness to the original written form. This work is divided into two chapters a theoretical part, where we will tackle the issue of slavery in America, slave narratives, movie adaptations, and a second chapter which is more practical where we will introduce Solomon Northup's memoir and the movie based on it, then moving to similarities and deference's between them and concluding with issue of faithfulness to the original script.

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General

Introduction

Literature is a term used to describe written and sometimes spoken materials, derives from the Latin “Literatura” meaning “writing formed with letters”. Literature most commonly refers to works of the creative imagination, including poetry, drama, fiction, nonfiction works, journalism, and in some instances songs.

Like any other national literature, American literature was shaped by the history of the country that produced it. During its early history, America was a series of British colonies; therefore, its literary tradition began as linked to the traditions of the British literature. It is by the late 18th and the early 19th centuries that the nation’s first novel was published with William Hill Brown’s *The Power of Sympathy*

After the American Revolution and increasingly after the war of 1812, American writers had to come up with a literature that is purely native, and this led to the appearance of four writers: William C Bryant, Washington Irving, James F Cooper and Edgar Allan Poe, who initiated a great half of the century’s literary development.

The Civil War and the political conflict surrounding the abolitionist movement, which was a movement dedicated to end the Atlantic Slave Trade and to set slaves free in all America; inspired the writings of William Lloyd Garrison and his paper ‘*The Liberator*’, along with Harriet Beecher Stowe in her world famous *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*. Those efforts were supported by the continuation of the slave narrative autobiographies.

Slave Narratives is a type of literary works made up of the written accounts of enslaved Africans in America. These are accounts of life, or a major portion of the life of a fugitive or a former slave. Slave narratives comprise one of the most influential traditions in American Literature, shaping the forms and themes of some of the most celebrated and controversial writings, both in fiction and autobiographies.

The first slave narrative to become an international best seller was the two volumes *Interesting Narratives of the Life of Olaudah Equiano; or Gustavus Vessa, the African, Written by Himself* (1789), which traces Equiano’s career from boyhood in West Africa to eventual freedom and economical success as a British citizen.

With the rise of the abolition movement in the early 19th century, came a demand for hard hitting eyewitness accounts of the harsh realities of slavery in the United States. In response, *The Narrative of Frederick Douglass*(1845), William Well Brown(1847), Henry Bidd(1849), Sojourner Truth(1850), Solomon Northup(1853) and William and Elen Craft(1868) claimed thousands of readers in England as well as the United States.

Typically, the Slave Narrative centers on the narrator's passage from slavery in the South to freedom in the North, but the selected story in some ways is a little different; it is about a free black man from New York who got kidnapped into slavery and lived as a slave for twelve years until he was rescued and got back to his family. It is the story of Solomon Northup and his autobiography *12 Years a Slave*.

Solomon Northup was born in July 1808 in Minerva; New York. His father was once a slave but was released after the death of his master. Solomon grew up knowing freedom. Northup worked on a farm and learned to read and write, and also played the violin. He was married and had three kids. While seeking employment, Northup met two men who drugged him and conducted him into slavery in the South where he was enslaved for 12 years. Suffering from one slave-owner to another, he was freed in 1853. In the same year he published his autobiography *12 Years a Slave* and became bestseller. Solomon Northup's autobiography became widely known for its meticulousness and thoughtful qualities and aided the abolitionist movement cause.

The memoir has been adopted as two film versions, produced as the 1984 PBS television movie *Solomon Northup's Odyssey* and Oscar winning 213 film *12 Years a Slave* by Steve McQueen and John Ridley.

Steve McQueen's historical drama movie seems to be so far the perfect and fair representation of Solomon's memoir. It shows all the details of the life of Solomon as a free man then how he was enslaved for 12 years, till he regained his freedom and reunion with his family.

While working on Solomon Northup's *12 Years a Slave* and Steve McQueen's film version, we noticed that Solomon tried to provide the reader with the daily life details that a slave had to endure; that he as a slave had to endure while being enslaved. He showed us the foul language, the extreme violence and the sexual torture. We cannot picture a more extreme narrative than his. Steve McQueen's version was perfectly performed; it pictured the life of a slave in the American South, primarily in two plantations: one governed by a relatively benevolent master and in the other subject to a brutal tyrant. He also exposed how it is hard for women to be slaves with all the temptations, rape, sexual offence and explicit nudity.

These observations trigger the following questions:

- What are the similarities and differences between both the book and the movie *12 Years a Slave*?
- What are slave narratives?
- Was the film loyal and faithful to the book?

Solomon Northup and Steve McQueen are two different men from two different eras with different jobs, but they share something which is *12 Years a Slave*. Therefore, we may say that McQueen's film version is different from the book; perhaps they share the same plot and the same historical aspects but they differ in terms of actions and contribution of the actors in the story. On the other hand, the movie maybe loyal and faithful to the book; they can share a lot in common.

This work has been divided into two chapters; the first one is more theoretical and will deal with issues like slavery in America. Then, we will move to the literature in America with its different eras till the most influential genre which is one of the main themes of our research, namely; the Slave Narratives. The focus in Slave Narratives will be on Solomon Northup's memoir *12 Years a Slave*. Since the latter was adapted into a film by Steve McQueen and John Ridley, we will provide an overview of film adaptations of literary works and the role it plays nowadays.

The second chapter will be devoted to Solomon Northup's Narrative. We analyse it, stating the many points and important topics that Northup tackled in his memoir, then we will move to McQueen's film version of the book. We will see whether the director added scenes that were not in the book in the first place and omitted others, then we will dive into some similarities and differences between the book and the movie and mainly the issue of faithfulness.

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Overview of Slave Narratives and Movie Adaptations

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1.1- Introduction

Slavery is an important topic in the history of America, at a time when America was growing up for an economic change, there were not enough labors to pump into the economy, so they thought of the immigration of the Africans who would work in the Coton, Tobacco and Rice plantations. Basically, the foundations that caused slavery in America came up in the start of the 17th century when European settlers especially in North America were looking for cheap labor in large quantities; the African slaves offered more affordable labor than the indentured servants who mainly comprised of the poor and the vulnerable Europeans. Slavery is the most horrible thing that people faced throughout history and it was considered as the worst system ever existed in our world, the issue took course during the 17th and 18th century American colonies, so slavery appeared in the time of the foundation if the new country economically. Sooner than later, slavery took its tool and plunged America into a vice whose effects are still being felt to date.

Slaves have developed their own traditions, culture, literature so we noticed the coming of a new branch of literature that we can call ‘the Slave Narratives’ or ‘the Fugitive Narratives’, most of them were biographies of former slaves, or runaway slaves, this kind of writings had a great impact on the American society and it led them to have an image of what happend to those slaves when enslaved, the kinds of horror they suffered, the everyday struggle to gain their freedom.

1.2- The Issue of Slavery in America¹

Slavery is a system of forced labour that has existed throught the world for thousands of years. In America, slavery began in the 17th century, when people from Africa were overpowered and forced to work and leave their native lands, their cultures and their families behind.

Europeans responded by caussing one tribe to enslave another, thretnening to arm their enemies with terrifying new weaponsif they do not cooperate, they selected strong healthy males and females between the ages of 18 and 35, although

¹The majority of this part has been summarised from (Deborah, 2013, p. 224,225,226)

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children were often captured as well, the African captives were chained together by the ankle and the wrist or linked at the neck by wooden yokes, once bound, the captives embarked into a crucial march sometimes that went to 600 miles to the coast where European ships were waiting for them. The Atlantic crossing took from 6 to 8 weeks and those slaves were gathered in some tight rooms in the bottom of the ship. This situation was so horrible that most of the slaves sunk into a deep depression, some choose death rather than to endure the degradation. (Kolchin, 1994, p. 73)

The first slaves in American colonies, a cargo of about twenty Africans arrived at James Town, Virginia in 1619, the number of enslaved Africans increased each year, in 1763, the colonial population included an estimated of 230,000 Africans most of them were slaves in the south. (Ibid)

By the late 18th century, the textile industry had ended a period of rapid development in both England and the Northern United States, this growth created a tremendous demand for selling cotton. In 1793, Eli Whitney developed a cotton gin, a machine that cleans cotton five times faster than manual methods; as a result more slaves were needed to pick the cotton. By 1816, there were about 4 million African slaves in the United States. This enormous population of slaves was owned by small groups of the wealthiest and most powerful white men in the society. As African slaves worked in the fields, laws were created to enforce their low status; they were prohibited from participating in lawsuits, from owning property or fire arms and from having alcohol, most states did not recognize slave marriages, and often prohibited slaves from learning, reading and writing. The treatment that slaves had from their masters was very violent; some owners were brutal rapists who forced their slaves on hard work mercilessly, threatening them as objects, and beating them with all kinds of torture and painful punishment.

A slave had no protection from this treatment because the law considered the slave as another man's property not a human being, when a slave suffered a whipping, he could neither fight back nor take his master to court; slaves

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developed an independent culture, unknown to their masters, they spread fantastic spoken narratives that passed from a generation to the other; these folk tales expressed the enslaved African aspiration for a better life. At the core of slave society, there was the slave family that suffered when one member was sold to another plantation, owners usually kept women and children together selling off the fathers and sons. Although religion, folk tales and family life soften the horrors of slavery; they did not listen to the humiliating aspects of servitude, slaves searched for more direct means of resisting their bondage through violent rebellions².

The best known slave revolt in the United States history, is the one that occurred in 1831, when 'Nat Turner', an enslaved African American preacher, led the most significant slave uprising in American history. He and his band of followers launched a short, bloody, rebellion in Southampton County, Virginia. The militia quells the rebellion, and Turner is eventually hanged. As a consequence, Virginia institutes much stricter slave laws. (Turner, 2011, p36)

Many men and women known as 'the Abolitionists' worked to end slavery, which they viewed as immoral and un-Christian, so they could not comprehend how Americans steeped in the tenets of the declaration of independence and could sanction the enslavement of human beings. Many former slaves supported the abolitionist movement like Sojourner Truth, she traveled widely; speaking from both racial and gender causes. The abolitionist movement attracted members of both races including the prominent journalist William Lloyd Garrison who published 'The Liberator' the leading anti-slavery newspaper of the day, and became one of the most famous figures in the abolitionist movement. Frederick Douglass, another figure of anti-slavery movement who was born a Maryland slave in about 1817, escaped to the north, and became an agent of the Massachusetts' anti-slavery society, and an orator for black freedom. In 1847, Douglass founded an

² http://www.digitalhistory.uh.edu/disp_textbook.cfm?smtID=2&psid=3045

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abolionistenews paper called ‘*The North Star*’, an abolitionist newspaper edited and published in England. (Kolchin, 1994, p. 74)

On plantations, slaves performed numerous jobs and they were placed in hierchalranks. Field slaves were devided into groups of 5 to 10 and supervised by a slave driver often the slave master himself, many slaves escaped to freedom in a series of trains known as ‘The Underground Railroad’. (Gara, 1961, p. 8).

The Underground Railroad were a series of people willing to hide slaves in their homes and conduct them to the next station or a safe house until they could reach freedom in the north, it was also aided by Northern abolitionist organizations such as the Philadelphia Vigilance Commity who gave supplies and helped conduct people into slavery, Bettye Collier-Thomas the director of center of African American history and culture described the commity as:

The Philadelphia Vigilance Commity was a very important groupe engaged in aiding fugitive slaves, it was a groupe that operated from the late 1830s to the early 1840s, and was comprised of fugitives as well as free blacks and white supporters...the provided food, clothes and money, guiding them all to safe places in the north.

Pursued by angry slave masters and bounty hunters, the road for escaped slaves was dangerous and hard and many did not survive the hardship or got caught and return to their masters. The most known slave runaway that helped the Railroad slaves was ‘Harriet Tubman’ who became known as the ‘Moses’ of her people reffering to biblical Moses who delivered his people from the Egyptian boundage, she was famously known by helping the slaves and giving them freedom. Tubman escaped from a Maryline plantation in 1849, and became familiar with the roads and hiding places that the runaway slaves used to get to the safe north. Shesuccesfully helped over 600 slaves to freedom including her own family. (Larson, 2004, p. xvii).

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In 1859, John Brown and 21 of his followers captured the federal arsenal at Harpers Ferry, Virginia, (now West Virginia) in an attempt to launch a slave revolt, Brown could control the armory, killed the town's mayor, and took several hostages, before he was captured by the Federal authorities and hung two months later. (Reynolds, 2005, p.199)

By 1860, Abraham Lincoln was elected the 16th president of the United States of America, he opposed the expansion of slavery, and his victory resulted the south to revolt. By 1861, 7 states; Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, South Carolina and Texas had succeeded to be united and formed 'the Confederate States of America.' (Williams, 2006, p.74)

The Civil war started in 1861 between the Confederate states often called 'The South' and the North 'The Union', the war was mainly about the issue of slavery, especially the expansion of slavery in the Western territories, in December 1863; President Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation, declaring that all persons held as slaves within the confederate states are, and henceforward shall be free. (Huddleston, 2002, p3).

The Civil War ended in 1865, and brought freedom to nearly 4 million slaves, and Lincoln was assassinated. By December 1865, the congress passed the 13th amendment to the Congress of the United States, granting the freedom of African slaves, it stated 'neither slavery nor involuntary servitude shall exist within the United States'. (Tsesis, 2004, p14)

The Civil War destroyed the institution of slavery but it did not end racism of white southerners who wanted their former slaves to retain their inferior status. Discrimination against Americans of African descent continued; like Tubman and Douglass before them, new leaders will be called forward by African Americans to guide their fight for freedom (Green, 2014)

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1.3- The Literary Movement in America

American writing began with the work of English adventurers and colonists in the New World chiefly for the benefit of readers in the mother country.

1.3.1- American Literature

Like any other country or national literature, American literature was shaped by the history of the country that produced it, during the period of creation the country and for almost a century and a half; America was mainly a series of British colonies on the eastern coast of the North American continent. American literature is a literature written or produced in the area of the United States and its preceding colonies, and it is also the body of written works produced in English language in the United States. The New England colonies were the center of early American literature. The earliest American literature was an interesting mixture of travel accounts and religious writing produced by immigrants from England. Some basic qualities of the American writers are that the writer is very independent, individualistic, critical and innovative³.

1.3.2- The History of American Literature

It is generally held that the literature of colonial America, approximately from 1607 to 1765, has allowed us to gain a better understanding of American history, their earliest forms of literature and writing.

Captain John Smith was the first one to establish the permanent English settlement in North America and he is also considered to be the first American author, it was not until 1780, another 100 years ago later that people started to call themselves Americans distinguishing the identity from their European insisters. (ibid)

³<http://www.britannica.com/art/American-literature>

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At the beginning of the 17th century, the West Continental area that was to become the United States had been probed only slightly by English and European explorers. The English settlement in Virginia and Massachusetts began the main stream for which we recognize as the American national history. Almost a 100 years earlier, the Caribbean island, Mexico and other parts of central and south America has been occupied by the Spanish. the earlier settlers included Dutch, Germans, French, Spaniards, Italian and Portuguese. (Beverley, 1855, p. 26) All contributed to the forming of the American civilization, but the colonies that became the first United States were for the most part English sustained by English traditions, ruled by laws, supported by English commerce, and named after English monarchs and English lands,

The first American literature was neither American nor real literature, it was not American because it was the work mainly of immigrants from England. It was not literature as we know it... in the form of poetry, essay, or fiction ... but rather an interesting mixture of travel books and religious writings. (Bode, 1995, p138)

This quote by Edgar Allan Poe is very important for understanding American literature. Compared with other western literatures, diversity became the outstanding feature of American literature; the growth of colonial America into the United States has been recorded through literature. Almost all literature came from humble origins; diaries, journals, letters, sermons, travel books, etc, so did the American literature. In the colonial period, personal literature occupied a major position in the literary scene, in content, they served either God or the expansion or both, in form; they were mainly the imitations of the English tradition (Skipp, 1992, p. 2).

At first American literature was naturally a colonial literature written mostly by authors who were born and raised abroad mainly in Europe and learned to write as such John Smith, the captain of the may flower ship, who settled in Richmond, Virginia, the one that was credited with initiating the first American literature. The

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first book that has been written in the American territory was intitled ‘*The True Relation of Virginia*’ in 1608. Then, we have other writers who described mostly each colony like Daniel Danton’s brief description of New York (1670) and William Evan’s account of ‘*The Province of Pennsylvania*’ (1682) as well as Thomas Ashe’s ‘*California*’ (1682). Those works mainly described and explained the colonizing opportunities to the Englishman and to present America as the land of opportunities (Ibid).

The English colonies in the American territories were the first forms of earlier American literature, the political writings by Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Pain and Samuel Adams were considered as a revolutionary period. In the post war period, Thomas Jefferson and the talented writers Alexander Hamilton, James Madison and John Jay of the federalist essays which is a series of 85 essays published in 1787 and 1788 which mostly represented a historical discussion of government, organization and republican values and gave an insight into problems of governments and logic then became a classical statement of American government. Jefferson’s declaration of independence and the mass of his letters have enhanced his status as the most talented early American writers. Thomas Jefferson was an influential, political writer during and after the war, his great summary “*The Declaration of Independence*” was considered as Madison pointed out “In a lucid communication of human rights ... in a style and tone appropriate to the great occasion, and to the spirit of the American people”⁴.

The nation’s first published novel was by the late 18th the beginning of the 19th and William Hill Brown’s ‘*The Power of Sympathy*’ (1789) was considered as the first American novel ever published in America, some new American literary figures appeared in the image of Washington Irving and Edgar Allan Poe and others sought to produce a new and unique American literature and culture. Edgar Allan Poe’s gothic tales of terror were written in accordance with his findings when he

⁴<http://www.britannica.com/art/American-literature/The-new-nation#toc42255>.

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studied the most popular magazines of the day. His masterpieces of terror “*The Fall of the House of Usher*” (1839), “*The Masque of the Red Death*” (1842), “*The Cask of Amontillado*” (1846), and others were written according to a carefully worked out psychological method. So were his detective stories, such as “*The Murders in the Rue Morgue*” (1841), which historians credited as the first of the genre. As a poet, he achieved fame with “*The Raven*” (1845). His work, especially his critical writings and carefully crafted poems, had perhaps a greater influence in France, where they were translated by Charles Baudelaire. After Poe, another writer called Washington Irving was considered as the first writer to develop a unique American style such as the humorous works in ‘*Salmagundi*’ (Schweitzer, 1988, p. 221-225).

The Transcendentalism movement started in the 1830s, by Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803-1862), the political conflict surrounding abolitionism inspired Harriet Beecher Stowe in her world famous “*Uncle Tom’s cabin*”; it was supported by the slave narratives autobiographies, and we can name Frederick Douglass’s ‘*Narration of His Life, an American Slave*’ (1845), the fugitive slave narratives that were published between 1760 and 1865 they were all about the past suffering, escape and freedom of a former slave. The anti transcendental movement specially the works of Nathaniel Hawthorne (1804- 1864) ‘*The Scarlet Letter*’ (1850) which is a novel about adultery, Herman Melville (1819-1891) with his ‘*Moby Dick*’ and ‘*Dilly Budd*’ and Edgar Allen Poe with ‘*The Fall of the House of Usher*’ all were popular that time and comprise a sort of dark Romanticism subgenre (Gray, 2004, p. 130).

We can not speak about the American literature without putting the spot light on the 19th century American poetry and the greatest poets in that era were; Walt Whitman (1819-1892) and Emily Dickinson (1830-1886) both different in temperament and style. Whitman was a working man, a traveler, a self-appointed nurse during the American Civil War (1861–1865), and a poetic innovator. His magnum opus was ‘*Leaves of Grass*’. Dickinson on the other hand lived the ceiled life of a classy unmarried woman in Amherst, Massachusetts; her works were unconventional for her time and little of it was published. American poetry had

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climbed to the top by the mid 20th century with notable poets such as T.S Eliot, Robert Frost, Ezra Pound and E.E Lummings⁵.

Samuel Langhorne Clemens (1835-1910) best known as Mark Twain had a special way of writing using signs, new invented words, local dialects; he made the character sounds real, like he did in his memoir 'Life on the Mississippi' and his novel "Adventures of Huckleberry Finn". Another 19th century literary realism author was Henry James (1843-1916) who wrote mainly about the dilemma of the new world versus the old world, in other words, he showed the encountering relationship between Europe and Europeans with Americans. The most famous work by Henry James is his novel 'Daisy Miller' and 'The Turn of the Screw', both Henry James and Mark Twain were leaders of the realist stream. (Skipp, 1992, p. 49)

At the beginning of the 20th century, American novelists were expanding fiction's social spectrum to encompass both high and low life and sometimes connected to the naturalist school of realism. In her stories and novels, Edith Wharton (1862–1937) scrutinized the upper-class, Eastern-seaboard society in which she had grown up, and she clarified it more in her novel 'The Age of Innocence'. More directly political writings discussed social issues and power of corporations. Some like Edward Bellamy in 'Looking Backward' outlined other possible political and social frameworks. Upton Sinclair, most famous for his muck-raking novel 'The Jungle', that advocated socialism in America. Other political writers of the period included Edwin Markham, William Vaughn Moody, journalistic critics, including Ida M. Tarbell and Lincoln Steffens were labeled The Muckrakers. Henry Brooks Adams' literate autobiography, 'The Education of Henry Adams' also depicted a stinging description of the education system and modern life. (Skipp, 1992, p.75)

American writers also expressed the disillusionment following the war. The stories and novels of F. Scott Fitzgerald (1896–1940) capture the restless, pleasure-

⁵<http://www.britannica.com/art/American-literature#toc59268>

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hungry, defiant mood of the 1920s. Fitzgerald's characteristic theme, expressed poignantly in *'The Great Gatsby'*, is the tendency of youth's golden dreams to dissolve in failure and disappointment. Depression era literature was blunt and direct in its social criticism; John Steinbeck's (1902–1968) style was simple and evocative, winning him the favor of the readers but not of the critics. Steinbeck often wrote about poor, working-class people and their struggle to lead a decent and honest life. *'The Grapes of Wrath'*, considered his masterpiece, is a strong, socially-oriented novel that tells the story of the Joads, a poor family from Oklahoma and their journey to California in search of a better life(ibid).

The period in time from the end of World War II up until, roughly, the late 1960s and early 1970s saw the publication of some of the most popular works in American history such as *'To Kill a Mockingbird'* by Harper Lee. The last few of the realistic modernists along with the wildly Romantic beatniks largely dominated the period, while the direct respondents to America's involvement in World War II contributed in their notable influence⁶.

The poetry and fiction of the "Beat Generation", largely born of a circle of intellectuals formed in New York City around Columbia University and established more officially some time later in San Francisco, came of age. The term Beat referred, all at the same time, to the counter cultural rhythm of the Jazz, to a sense of rebellion regarding the conservative stress of post-war society, and to an interest in new forms of spiritual experience through drugs, alcohol, philosophy, and religion, and specifically through Zen Buddhism. Regarding the war novel specifically, there was a literary explosion in America during the post–World War II era. Some of the best known of the works produced included Norman Mailer's *'The Naked and the Dead'* (1948). From the early 1970s to the present day the most important literary movement has been Postmodernism and the flowering of literature by ethnic minority writers (Skipp, 1992, p. 130).

⁶<http://fr.slideshare.net/khimdelacruz07/history-of-american-literature-28410486>

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Like other national literatures, American literature was shaped by the history of the country that produced it. For almost a century and a half, America was merely a group of colonies scattered along the eastern seaboard of the North American continent colonies from which a few hardy souls tentatively ventured westward. After a successful rebellion against the motherland, America became the United States, a nation. By the end of the 19th century this nation extended southward to the Gulf of Mexico, northward to the 49th parallel, and westward to the Pacific. By the end of the 19th century, too, it had taken its place among the powers of the world; its fortunes so interrelated with those of other nations that inevitably it became involved in two world wars and, following these conflicts, with the problems of Europe and East Asia. Meanwhile, the rise of science and industry, as well as changes in ways of thinking and feeling brought many modifications in people's lives. All these factors in the development of the United States molded the literature of the country⁷.

1.4- Slave Narratives in America

In order to better understand the American history, we have to say that Americans within the 13 colonies and for nearly two centuries, bought and kept slaves from African descent in bondage, it is nearly impossible to know how it all began, and it is also difficult to understand life in America today without speaking about the role of slavery in the development of America.

1.4.1- Introduction to the Slave Narratives

Slavery existed probably before history started to be recorded, so we can say that slavery existed for so long that we can't trace its roots exactly, from ancient Egypt, to Greece and all the other ancient kinds and empires in the world were built on the ruins of men who were considered as property, as Plato stated "dictatorship naturally arise out of democracy, and the most aggravated form of tyranny and slavery out of the most extreme liberty" (427bc-347bc)⁸.

⁷<http://www.britannica.com/art/American-literature/After-World-War-II>

⁸<http://www.localhistories.org/slavery.html>

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The origin of the word 'slave' is from the latin word 'scalavus' and it has two meanings different from each other. The first meaning is 'slave' and the second one is 'slav' and the Slav are people from eastern Europe who were conquered in 800s and often sold into slavery. In America, slavery dates back to 1619, when the first slave arrived to Jamestown; Virginia. From that date, America has been considered as the homeland of slavery, at least 11.8 million slaves were shipped from Africa to America between 1519 and 1867(Oxford Dictionary, 1989).

All that history of violence, mistreatment of people in America, has led slaves into creating some sort of literature, that was mostly stories of slaves or free slaves (fugitives) and was mostly written by slaves themselves, or orally transmitted and written by others. Those accounts were stories created in the plantations and passed from one generation to another, this sort of literature was variously known as the 'slave naratives', the 'freedom narratives', or the 'liberation narratives'.

1.4.2- Beginning

Slave narratives became the voice of reality for black men mostly in the south, those narratives gave the northerners a glimpse into the life of the slaves in the south, stories that described the bond between friends, the family life in plantation, the respect of elders, the love between the family members, also gave them a direct image on that new culture, the African American one that expended throught music, folkstories, and religion.

The slave narrative genre became famous at that time, many slave narratives were translated into all languages in the world, narrators became anti-slavery lecturers, and there were around 100 slave narratives including those of OlaudahEquiano, Frederick Douglass, William Wells Brown, Harriet Jacobs, and Sojourner Truth. What made those narratives so popular is that they were true fact about how they were captured in Africa, the trip they had from their homeland Africa to the American lands. The life they had in plantations in the south; the way they were treated by their masters, all the way to their escape from slavery as

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runaways to the less painful north. For their audience it was something new; something they never saw before⁹.

1.4.3- Publications

From the early beginnings of the slave narrative literature by 1760, we can count approximately 100 slave narrative books, autobiographies, and poems in the United States, all those narrations were gathered by the WPA (Federal Writers' Project) and they published them all in almost 40 volumes. (Larson, 1939, p. 491)

The well known narrator Olaudah Equiano, after spending 13 years in slavery, bought his freedom in 1767 and moved to England, in 1789. His slave narrative '*Interesting Narratives of the Life of Olaudah Equiano; or, Gustavus Vassa, the African, Written by Himself*' was published and it became the international best-seller novel, and today it remains the most descriptive and well known slave narrative describing not only his experience while enslaved but also his captivity (Carretta, 2005, p. 365).

William W. Brown, born into slavery in 1814, and escaped to Ohio in 1834 at the age of 20, settled in Boston where he published his first novel entitled '*Narration of William W. Brown a Fugitive Slave. Written by Himself*' in 1847 and went into 4 editions in the first years, then in 1853, he published what is considered to be the first African American novel '*Clotel*' or '*The President's Daughter*'. The very well-known Frederick Douglass published three autobiographies, the first in 1847 called '*A Narrative in the Life of Frederick Douglass an American Slave*', and sold 30.000 copies between 1845 and 1860, then '*My Bondage and My Freedom*' in 1855, and finally '*Life and Times Of Frederick Douglass*' in 1881. Harriet Jacobs the African American writer, who escaped from slavery and was later freed, published '*Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl, Written by Herself*' in 1862, under the pen name Linda Brent¹⁰.

⁹ <http://www.britannica.com/art/African-American-literature#toc232346>

¹⁰ <http://history1800s.about.com/od/slaveryinamerica/a/clslnarratives.htm>

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Solomon Northup who was born a free man but kidnaped and sold into slavery published a memoir called ‘*12 Years a Slave*’ in 1853, sold over 27.000 copies during its first two years in print¹¹.

The first female African American novelist Harriet E. Willson with her novel ‘*The Nig*’ published in 1852, by Henry Louis Gates Jr, who documented it as the first African American novel published in the United States. In 1861, Harriet Jacobs published her narrative ‘*Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*’ and it discusses the sexual abuse that female slaves had to endure. All those novelists and slave narrators led the foundation of all African American literature following the civil war¹².

1.4.4- Solomon Northup (1807- ?)

Born in July 10, 1807 in Minerva, Essex County in the State of New York, an American farmer and musician became involved in the abolition movement, in 1828. He married Ann Hampton, and in 1834, the couple moved to Saratoga Springs, New York (Nilson, 2002, p. 290).

By 1841, he was recruited by two men who claimed to be circus performers and offered him money to join their act as a Fiddler, but as soon as he traveled to Washington D.C, he was drugged and woke up to find himself in shackles in an underground cell, later on, he was sold under the name of Platt Hamilton, and spent 12 years in slavery in Louisiana’s Red River Valley (Nilson, 2002, P290).

In April 1843, he was sold by Ford and Tibaut to Edwin Epps. By January 4th, 1853, he was freed and joined his family. In his first year of freedom he published a memoir ‘*Twelve Years a Slave*’, a book that is in reality a group of letters he sent to his friends and others that he wrote while enslaved (Ibid).

He disappears from the historical records in 1857, although a letter later reported him alive in early 1863. Some commentators thought he has been kidnaped again, but historians believe it unlikely, as he would have been

¹¹ <http://history1800s.about.com/od/slaveryinamerica/fl/Solomon-Northup-Author-of-Twelve-Years-a-Slave.htm>

¹² <http://oldschool1003.hellobeautiful.com/2346056/finding-your-roots-with-dr-henry-louis-gates/>

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considered too old to bring a good price. The details of his death have never been documented. (Nilson, 2002, p293)

Northup's memoir was adopted and produced at the 1984 PBC television movie 'Solomon Northup's Odyssey' and the 2013 feature film 12 Years a Slave that later won 3 of the Academy Awards in 2014 for best picture and best Adapted Screenplay. (Ibid)

1.5- Adaptation

Literary adaptation is the adapting of a literary source (e.g. a novel, short story, poem...) to another genre or medium, such as a film, stage play, or video game. It can also involve adapting the same literary work in the same genre or medium, just for different purposes, e.g. to work with a smaller cast, in a smaller venue (or on the road), or for a different demographic group (such as adapting a story for children). Sometimes the editing of these works without the approval of the author can lead to a court case. The debate on cinematic adaptation works was for many years dominated by the questions of fidelity to the source and by the tendencies of prioritizing the literary originals over their film versions. (Whelehan, 1999, p.28).

Adaptations were seen by most of the critics as inferior to the adopted texts, as 'minor', 'subsidiary', 'desivative' or 'secondary' products, that means when we adapt and transfer a work to a movie or a theatrical adaptation or any kind of known adaptation, it loses its symbolic richness and the book will miss its spirit, the critics saw the major fault of adaptation as that the filmmakers were unable to present the deep meaning of the text and that they omitted a lot of the necessary details of the plot. From the earliest days of cinema, in nineteenth-century Europe, adaptation from such diverse resources has been a ubiquitous practice of filmmaking (Leitch, 2007, p. 23–24). Between 1994 and 2013, 58% of the top grossing films in the world were adaptations. (Follows, 2014)

John Harrington, in his book *Film and Art*, estimated that a third of all films ever made have been adapted from novels, and, if you included other literary

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forms, such as drama or short stories, that estimation might well be 65 percent or more. Nearly all of the works of classic literature students study in high school have been adapted for film—some many times and in multiple languages, settings, or formats. For example, there are over 200 film versions of Sherlock Holmes, from a silent film made in 1916 by William Gillette to the reimagined 2010 Masterpiece version starring Benedict Cumberbatch. There are nearly 50 film versions of Romeo and Juliet, from a 1900 French version called *Roméo et Juliette* to the 2011 animated American film *Gnomeo and Juliet*. But turning a novel into a screenplay is not just a matter of pulling dialogue from the pages of a book (Schulten, 2004, p15)

The major difference between film and books is that visual images stimulate our perceptions directly, while written words can do this indirectly. Reading the word chair requires a kind of mental “translation” that viewing a picture of a chair does not. Film is a more direct sensory experience than reading—besides verbal language, there is also color, movement, and sound (ibid).

There are three main reasons a filmmaker or screenwriter might make major changes in adapting a literary work to film. One is simply the changes demanded by a new medium. Film and literature each have their own tools for manipulating narrative structure. In a novel, a new chapter might take us back to a different time and place in the narrative; in a film, we might go back to that same time and place through the use of a flashback, a crosscut, or a dissolve (ibid, p18).

1.5.1. Novel Adaptation

Novels are frequently adapted for films. For the most part, these adaptations attempt either to appeal to an existing commercial audience (the adaptation of best sellers and the "prestige" adaptation of works) or to tap into the innovation and novelty of a less well known author. Inevitably, the question of "faithfulness" arises, and the more high profile the source novel is, the more insistent are the questions of fidelity. (Leitch, 2007, p.23)

The best known book to movie adaptations are numerous and we can state some of those starting with Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* in 1939, Charles

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Dickens's *Great Expectations* in 1946, Edith Wharton's *The Age of Innocence* in 1993, Steig Larsson's *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo* in 2009, Jane Austin's *Sense and Sensibility* in 1995 and *Pride and Pregudice* in 2005 and Solomon Northup's *12 Years a Slave* in 2013. (Leitch, 2007, p.23)

1.5.2. Theatrical Adaptation

Stage-to-film is a term used when describing a motion picture that has been adapted from a stage play. There have been stage-to-film adaptations since the beginning of motion pictures. Many of them have been nominated for, or have won, awards. Movies sometimes use plays as their sources. William Shakespeare has been called the most popular screenwriter in Hollywood. There are not only film versions of most of Shakespeare's works but also multiple versions of many of the plays. (Anderegg, 2004, p 193)

1.5.3- Television Adaptation

Feature films are occasionally created from television series or television segments. In these cases, the film will either offer a longer storyline than the usual television program's format or will offer expanded production values. The American television variety show *Saturday Night Live* has been the origin of a number of films, beginning with *The Blues Brothers*, The most recent of these *Saturday Night Live* originated films is a case of double television origin: *Fat Albert*, which began with an impression of another television show based on the comedy routine of Bill Cosby. Mr Bean was adapted into *Bean* and the sequel, *Mr. Bean's Holiday*. (Carrigan, 1999, p 184)

1.5.4. Adaptation of Films

When a film's screenplay is original, it can also be the source of derivative works such as novels and plays. For example, movie studios will commission novelizations of their popular titles or sell the rights to their titles to publishing houses. These novelized films will frequently be written on assignment and sometimes written by authors who have only an early script as their source.

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Consequently, novelizations are quite often changed from the films as they appear in theatres. (Hutcheon, 2009)

Novelization can build up characters and incidents for commercial reasons (for instance to market a card or computer game, to promote the publisher's "saga" of novels, or to create continuity between films in a series.

There have been instances of novelists who have worked from their own screenplays to create novels at nearly the same time as a film. Both Arthur C. Clarke, with *2001: A Space Odyssey*, and Graham Greene, with *The Third Man*, have worked from their own film ideas to a novel form (although the novel version of *The Third Man* was written more to aid in the development of the screenplay than for the purposes of being released as a novel). Both John Sayles and Ingmar Bergman write their film ideas as novels before they begin producing them as films, although neither director has allowed these prose treatments to be published. (ibid)

1.6- From Paper to T.V

Film is the art of our time, we are told that we are all children of movies and instinctively understand them better than any generation that has gone before, while the adapted film is an artistic expression of the filmmaker's interpretation, it is also a cooperation of the talents and perspectives, as a crew contributed to their expertise, on set design, writing sounds, music and cinematography, all under the insight and direction of the author. On the top of all that, there are agent keys of distribution and are the actors. (Tolentino, 2016)

In adopting a print text or theatre production to film, directors may vary in terms of the degree and nature of how they use the original content of the text or play. They can stick quite close to the original text to create a highly literal reproduction of the text, or they can create a totally different version of the text. Giannetti (2002) described three different degrees of fidelity of the original subject matter 'the lose', 'the faithfull' and 'the literal' (p. 406)

1.7- Conclusion

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In this chapter we tried to shed light on some aspects of the American history, starting with the issue of slavery that is the huge problem that faced America and it still influence people there specially with racism, then we moved to a literary branch that mostly appeared due to slavery and that is the slave narratives, where we stated the history of this genre, main figures and their books, with a little focus over Solomon Northup's memoir, because it was transformed into a movie and that's what we are going to see in the second chapter.

After the slave narratives, we tackled the issue of movie adaptations stating the different types, with some key works that have been done, we also talked about how to turn a literary work into a screenplay.

In the following chapter we are going to see an exemple of adaptation and that is Solomon Northup's 12 Years a Slave being transformed by Steve McQueen into a worldwide famous movie.

Chapter two:

Twelve Years a Slave;

The Book VS The
movie

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2.1- Introduction

Slavery is an issue that has a direct relationship with American history since mostly slaves are the ones who built what we know today as the United States of America. During their enslavement, slaves developed their own traditions, culture and kinds of literature mostly oral because the majority of them were illiterate. In this chapter we are going to deal with a very important work that illustrates Slavery in the Southern part of the US and that is Solomon Northup's *Twelve Years a Slave*.

The book is a real life memoir written by a black man who was born free in New York, but has been tricked to go to Washington, kidnapped there and sold into slavery in the south where he was kept for twelve years before being able to write letters to his friends and family who in return helped him to regain his freedom.

The book has been re-discovered by the British black filmmaker Steve McQueen and screenwriter John Ridley in 2013, and they transformed it into what was later known as the biggest film about slavery in the history of America. Going worldwide, the film gained awards and acclaims as well as criticism, and what we are going to discover forward will be about the issue of faithfulness in McQueen's movie as compared to the original script as well as similarities and differences.

2.2-Solomon Northup's *Twelve Years a Slave*

Twelve Years a Slave is a slave account written by Solomon Northup and edited by David Wilson which described the suffering that Solomon endured during the years he spent in slavery.

2.2.1- The Plot Summary

Solomon Northup is black free man born in 1808 in Minerva, New York City, from an enslaved father called Mintus. In 1821, at the age of 21, Solomon married a Native American woman named Ann Hampton. They had three children and lived in Saratoga Spring. Solomon was a violin player and worked as a farmer.

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One day in 1841, he met two white gentlemen; Merrill Brown and Abram Hamilton who tricked him to go to Washington where they kidnapped him, then he woke up to find himself chained in darkness; "... but when consciousness returned, I found myself alone, in utter darkness and in chains ..." (p. 38). Solomon was sold into slavery as a prisoner under a violent slave-trader called James H. Burch who stole from Solomon the idea of being a free black man and whipped him harshly if he ever mentioned or talked about it.

Later on, Solomon was moved to another master slave called Theophilus Freeman who, in his turn, changed Solomon's name into Platt and sold him with a slave girl called Eliza to a preacher named William Ford who seemed to be kind and generous with his slaves; this made Solomon work with no fear.

After a period of financial losses, Ford found himself obliged to sell Platt to another master who was the brutal carpenter John M. Tibbeats. Unlike Ford, Tibbeats was never satisfied, he made his slaves work from the early morning till late night, "... I was now compelled to labor very hard from earliest dawn until late at night; I was not allowed to a moment idle" (p 107). Solomon suffered a lot from the merciless mistreatment of his master, and he was saved two times from being murdered by Tibbeats thanks to William Ford.

Moreover, Tibbeats sold Platt to someone known by his bad behaviour over the black slaves called Edwin Epps. Solomon suffered ten years under the oppression, humiliation and the abuse of that master; "... it was rarely that a day passed by without one or more whipping ..." (p 179). There was also a slave girl called Patsey. She was a hard worker among the other slaves and was treated in the worst way by her master Epps who used to whip and rape her everyday because of his jealous wife Mary.

Solomon lost his hope to get free until he met a Canadian carpenter named Bass; an abolitionist who came to work on a building project for Epps, and he met Solomon and decided to help him even with the risk facing him in order to send the letters to Solomon's friends in the north.

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Finally the letters were received and Solomon was rescued from his captivity by a family friend called Henry B. Northup who could recognise Platt after a period of searching. Solomon came back home and reunited with his family in Saratoga Spring, New York City, after twelve years in slavery to find his daughter already married and he became a grandfather to his grandson who was named in his honour Solomon Northup Staunton.

2.2.2- The Process of Writing Solomon Northup's Slave Narrative

Solomon Northup's story was written directly after rescue from slavery, while he was still fresh in his mind from the experience he had during the twelve years of slavery. The book had some few memory errors which the other slave narratives were suffering from until the coming of the oral history interview by Works Progress Administration (WPA) of surviving the Ex-slaves in the 1930's. These people were chosen reasonably and sparingly by historians because, before, the former slaves were interviewed by white people who intimidated them and made them feel uncomfortable because of the prevalent racism. To confirm the slave narratives' reality, Solomon and his editor David Wilson dedicated the second edition 1854 to Harriet Beecher Stowe in confession to her great successful antislavery novel; *Uncle Tom Cabin* 1852. Solomon's experience as a slave presented a striking parallel to Stowe's fictitious account. (Fiske, 2012, p.29)

There is nothing to ensure who actually wrote *Twelve years a Slave*, but historians consider that it was a group project work between Solomon Northup and his editor David Wilson; a literary man living in New York (ibid).

The work of Solomon Northup; *Twelve Years a Slave* has been published eight years before the civil war by Derby and Miller of Auburn, New York, soon after Harriet Beecher Stowe's best-selling novel about slavery *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852). Northup's book was dedicated to Stowe, and sold 30,000 copies, that

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made it a best seller on its own right. The book was also published in several editions in the 19th century, and cited later by specialist works on slavery in the United States¹.

Twelve Years a Slave is a historical drama that was inspired and informed by Solomon Northup's best seller slave narrative, that is a real account of his life, a free black man living in Saratoga Springs, upstate New York, who was kidnapped in 1841 and sold into slavery, it shows the life of a slave in the south in two different plantations one that is governed by a relatively benevolent master and the other subject to a brutal tyrant, it also shows how hard it is for a women to be enslaved in those plantations².

2.3- *Twelve Years a Slave* Movie Guide

Twelve Years a Slave is a historical drama that was inspired and informed by Solomon Northup's best seller slave narrative, that is a real account of his life, a free black man living in Saratoga Springs, upstate New York, Who was kidnapped in 1841 and sold into slavery, it shows the life of a slave in the south in two different plantations one that is governed by a relatively benevolent master and the other subject to a brutal tyrant, it also shows how hard it is for a women to be enslaved in those plantations³.

2.3.1- Introducing the Movie

Inspired by real-life events, *Twelve Years a Slave*, the motion picture about the enslavement of Africans in America, by the black British film director Steve McQueen alongside screenwriter John Ridley, the movie is not the first movie about slavery in the United States but it may be the one that finally made it impossible for American cinema to continue to sell the ugly lies it has been hawking for more than a century.

At the center of the film is Chiwetel Ejiofor as Solomon Northup, the black British actor, born in London, the son of Nigerian parents, his performance as Northup

¹ <http://docsouth.unc.edu/fpn/northup/menu.html>

² <https://www.movieguide.org/reviews/12-years-a-slave.html>

³ <https://www.movieguide.org/reviews/12-years-a-slave.html>

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for better or worst will remain the role by which many will know him. Solomon Northup, an accomplished violinist and a free man living in the state of New York, went in a tour in 1841 with misters Brown (scoot McNairy) and Hamilton (Taran Killam) instead, he was kidnapped and enslaved in the South, no matter how many times he says he is free, Theophilus Freeman (Paul Giamatti) insisted he was not, and named him Platt.

William Ford (Benedict Cumberbatch) is a kind Christian slaveowner unlike his second master Edwin Epps (Michael Fassbender); a mean and hypocritical slaveowner who preys on the female slave Patsey (LupitaNyong'o). She became a subject of cruelty at the hands of Epps's wife Mary (Sarrah Paulson). The movie ends with the coming of a Canadian abolitionist called Bass (Brad Pitt) who helped Solomon to escape from his captivity and back to a free man again.

2.3.2- *Twelve Years a Slave; the Movie*

The movie begins with a few short scenes, an instruction in cane-cutting in Louisiana, a communal sleeping room, a shared meal in which Solomon uses some black raspberries that were served in his meal as an ink to write a letter to his family. It also shows a woman sleeping near Solomon and trying to engage him in a brief joyless sexual act. That is the beginning of the film but not the beginning of Northup's life as an enslaved person.

Northup seems to have a warm, loving family and a comfortable life; his wife Anne and Two children Margaret and Alonzo. Solomon says goodbye to his wife and children who has to go away for a couple of weeks so that his wife can earn some money cooking for a white family.

Meanwhile, Solomon meets two white men Brown (scoot McNairy) and Hamilton (Taran Killam) who claimed to be looking for people with remarkable talents to work in a circus, Northup went to Washington with the two men and was given food and drinks till he fell ill, when he woke up he was chained up in a slave pen

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just a short distance from the capitol building. In the movie Solomon told the men who put him in chains:

‘My name is Solomon Northup. I am a free man; a resident of Saratoga, New York. The residence also of my wife and children who are equally free. I have papers I promise you. You have no right whatsoever to detain me...’ (Min, 00:13-00:14)

Northup’s journey began when he was put in a ship heading south to Louisiana, where he lived as a slave for twelve years, and he was informed that he will be called Platt, he was sold by an unscrupulous businessman Theophilus Freeman (Paul Giamatti), moving from a slave-owner to another, the first owner was a Christian man named William Ford (Benedict Cumberbatch), he was a kind and a good man. Northup in his memoir refers to Ford charitably, however, Solomon got in a fight with Ford’s carpenter John Tibeats (Paul Dano) who was outraged by Solomon’s idea regarding the transport of lumber and tried to kill him, and told him that ‘I will have flash and I will have all of it’ William Ford tried to protect him, but he was in debt and had to sell Northup to another slaveowner that is the exact opposite of Ford and is Edwin Epps (Michael Fassbender). Ford told Solomon that he will give him to another slave-owner:

I believe Tibeats is skulkin' about the premises somewhere. He wants you dead, and he will attempt to have you so. It's no longer safe for you here. And I don't believe you will remain passive if Tibeats attacks. I have transferred my debt to Edwin Epps. He will take charge of you. (Min, 00:52-00:53)

It is on Epps’s plantation that the movie deepens and then hardens, because Solomon spent most of his days as a slave there, endured and saw the real horrors of slavery that he did not witness in Ford’s plantation.

McQueen’s masterpiece is just remarkable; he did not miss any detail, the image was clear. He kept the work out of the sentiments because he is black and his descendants were slaves too, the place of the shooting was a place where trees stood

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with beautiful moss and black bodies. What is remarkable in Northup's memoir is the description of everyday life, McQueen kept the same idea in his motion picture, the same exact scenes of slavery's extreme cruelties and the routines.

The rest of the following scenes of the movie show how Epps and his jealous wife Mary mistreated Solomon and a female slave named Patsey (Lupita Nyong'o) for the next ten years. Epps had a cotton plantation and Solomon had no experience in that unlike Patsey, who could pick more than five hundred pounds a day, he could not pick more than two hundred pounds which is the standard, that lead Epps to value her more due to her work, her appeal infuriates his wife, she threatens to leave her husband if he does not get rid of her, but he and in front of all said that if he has to choose between them, he will choose Patsey.

In some ways, *Twelve years a Slave* plays as a horror movie, Chiwetel Ejiofor delivers a superb performance as Solomon, whose character appears in nearly every scene. Casting Ejiofor was a stroke of brilliance, he embraced the character so fully we could not guess if he was a slave or just a character, his has a soft face that even though he was kidnapped and chained, could not believe what was happening to him.

Epps got angry in a scene when he went looking for Patsey on a Sunday, her day off; she often went to get soap from Mistress Show (Alfred Woodard) when Epps's wife Mary (Sarah Paulson) refused to give it to her. When Solomon went looking for her and brought her back, she was tied to the whipping post and Epps urged Solomon to whip her or else he will kill him, then Epps himself started whipping her 'Striking the life out of her', Mistress Epps insisted and Patsey's back was deeply ripped by the whipping and that gave Epps pleasure.

Twelve Years a Slave did not only show the brutal conditions and heartbreak suffered by the slaves in the south's peculiar institution, it also works to show how slavery taints the heart of even good hearted slave-owners in the image of the first slave-owner William Ford. Despite the movie's positive Christian references, *Twelve Years a Slave* could have used even more of them. There is, however, an interesting Christian scene that serves as the big turning point in the movie. In that scene,

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Solomon and the other slaves are holding a funeral service for one of the older slaves, who simply dropped dead one day working in the fields. The other slaves begin to sing a hymn to their fallen comrade. At first, Solomon is just sad and upset about the other slave's death and his own situation. However, the power of the Christian hymn begins to affect Solomon, and he begins to join in until, finally, he is heartily singing with the other slaves (Garrett, 2013).

The movie also depicts some foul language and brief extreme violence; for example the scene of Patsy's whipping is brutal, especially when the scene finally shows the lashes from Epps cutting into her broken and bleeding skin. The movie also has some full male and female nudity, when a female slave make Solomon touch her under her clothes and another scene where Epps comes in the middle of the night to Patsy to force her to have a sexual relationship with him, what is happening in the scene is more or less clear even though it does not show any explicit nudity.

At the end of the movie, a scene where Platt (Solomon's name under slavery) and the kind carpenter Bass (Brad Pitt) are talking and Bass hears Solomon's life story; that is the moment when Solomon asked him to send a letter to his friends in the north, and Bass agreed to do so, and does what he promises. In the last scene of the movie, an officer asked for Platt, and asked him if he knew the man in the caravan, and Solomon replied by yes and pointed to Mr. Parker and said I know him, and he confesses that his true name is Solomon Northup, and he is married to Ann Hampter and has two kids Margaret and Alonzo.

At that moment Epps refused to let go of Solomon claiming that he is his nigga, his property, and at the same time Mr. Parker gave the legal papers to Epps and Solomon left the plantation heading to his house in Saratoga Springs where he met his family after being away for Twelve years, the only words he said where : 'I apologize for my appearance but I have had a difficult time this past several years'(02:05-02:06) and they introduced him to his new grandson Solomon Northup Staunton, and that is where he hugged his entire family and by that the movie ends.

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Solomon Northup was one of many victims of kidnapping, but he is one of the few who could regain freedom from slavery.

2.4- *Twelve Years a Slave: The Astonishing Book behind the Movie*

Solomon Northup's memoir *Twelve Years a Slave* was a jewel book discovered by the black British filmmaker Steve McQueen and the screenwriter John Ridley that they turned to a magnificent film about slavery in America.

2.4.1- The Discovery of the Book by Steve McQueen

Steve McQueen the British filmmaker with his first two films *Hunger* (2008) about the prison hunger strike of Irish Revolutionary army activist Bobby Sands, and *Shame* (2011) about loneliness and sexuality, both featuring the actor Michael Fassbender, he showed that he has a good style and an ambition to tackle important topics. He wanted to do a third movie as he explained in his interview with The Guardian in the 2nd of October 2013

I knew I wanted to tell a story about slavery, but where to start? Finally I had this idea of a free man kidnapped into bondage, but that's all I had, I was attracted to a story that had a main character any viewer could identify with, a free man who is captured and held against his will. For months I was trying to build a story around this beginning but not having a great success.

Steve McQueen's aim was to tell a story about slavery in a way that would make his audience connect with the topic on a personal level. The idea of using a free man as a protagonist came before the decision to adapt *12 Years a Slave* – a book he had never heard of before.

John Ridley the film's screenwriter who is also from an African origin, said that they (he and Steve) have met due to an agent they knew in common

Steve and I set down to talk one day and we quickly realized that we were both keen to explore slavery as an idea, but it was Steve's wife

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cultural critic Bianca Stigler who gave him Solomon Northup's book otherwise I doubt we could have come across it. (McQueen, 2013)

Bianca suggested that they take a look at true accounts of slavery, within days of search for a memoir; she gave them Solomon Northup's *Twelve Years a Slave* memoir. Ridley and after finding the book stated that 'Steve loved the book and passed it to me, I thought it was a singular and evocative document. It's not long but I was overwhelmed by its scope and scale' and he also added that "the fact that a well-educated guy like me didn't know his story says a lot about how ignorant America can be of parts of its past. I'm delighted to help return him to our nation's culture" (McQueen, 2013)

Steve McQueen after reading the book stated that

'I read this book, and I was totally stunned. At the same time I was pretty upset with myself that I didn't know this book. I live in Amsterdam where Anne Frank is a national hero, and for me this book reads like Anne Frank's diary but written 97 years before – a firsthand account of slavery. I basically made it my passion to make this book into a film'⁴

Screenwriter John Ridley laments that currently we cannot write the last act of Solomon Northup's extraordinary life-story, because after the publication of his memoir he vanishes from the history records," hopefully with all the new interest in him, someone will be able to discover exactly what did happen to Solomon. That would be wonderful" (McQueen, 2013).

After the preparation of the scenario and the cast of the actors, and during a long development process in which Plan B Production Company that belongs to Brad Pitt backed the project which eventually helped to get some financing from various film studios, they raised a budget of 22 million dollars and the crew announced in August 2011, all the actors joined the cast in early 2012 and the filming was scheduled

⁴<http://www.npr.org/2013/10/24/240288057/12-years-a-slave-was-a-film-that-no-one-was-making>

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to begin at the end of June 2012, principal photography began in New Orleans, Louisiana on the 27th of June, 2012, and concluded after seven weeks in August 13, 2012. (Brooks, 2013)

2.4.2- The Movie's Awards

Steve McQueen's *Twelve Years a Slave* went worldwide when released in 2013 breaking all the records of the US Box Office and earned 187,7 million dollars during its opening in the United States itself according to the Box Office MOJO in 2014, and won over 234 awards in the United States and outside and about 305 nominations in which it won The Academy Awards as the best motion picture of the year (2013) and became the first film directed and produced by a black filmmaker (Steve McQueen), Lupita Nyong'o (Patsey) won the best performance by an actress in a supporting role, best written and adapted screenplay by John Ridley.

The movie also won a Golden Globe in the United States for best motion picture in the Drama genre, and won two BAFTA awards for best film by Steve McQueen and best leading actor Chiwetel Ejiofor. In the Acapulco Black Film Festival, Chiwetel Ejiofor won best actor, Steve McQueen best director, best supporting actress Lupita Nyong'o and best screenplay by John Ridley⁵.

Even though Northup's book was forgotten what McQueen succeeded to do was to give it a second birth and ironically Northup's end (death) remains unknown; a kind of mystery, whereas thanks to the film adaptation, Northup's end is known; it is successful.

2.5- The Debate about Realism and Violence in *Twelve Years a Slave*

Solomon Northup's *Twelve Years a Slave* is a true account of the life of a free man from Saratoga Springs who was drugged and conducted to slavery in 1841, in which he spent Twelve years as a slave from one plantation to another and from a slave-owner to another. He gained his freedom again and got back to his family which is not the case for almost all the free persons who were kidnapped and enslaved.

⁵www.imdb.com/title/tt2024544/awards

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Steve McQueen the British filmmaker transformed the book into a motion picture in 2013, the film gained numerous awards and acclaims from all over the world, but in the same time it has been heavily criticized. The film critic Armand White called it ‘Torture Porn’ and accused McQueen of turning slavery into a ‘Horror show’ and of confusing history with brutality, violence and misery. Bell Hooks the feminist Scholar and cultural critic accused McQueen of Sentimentality and going for weeping instead of constructive outrage. Some feminists had objected to the violence inflicted on Patsey’s body, while others have celebrated McQueen for dealing with the complex relationship between black and white women, and the double oppression suffered by women of color, yet other critics accused him of sugarcoating slavery by having a happy ending, so we can conclude by saying that McQueen was damned if he made a realistic and violent movie and damned if he did not⁶.

Filmmakers adopting existing stories make choices about what to include and what to ignore, what to emphasize and what to downplay. McQueen’s film is the adaptation of a true account of life. In short, though Solomon Northup is the author of the book, McQueen is the author of the movie. If McQueen eliminated violence from the movie, he would have eliminated the foundation on which slavery and the wealth of America was built on, to avoid using violence is one thing, but to show the suffering of Solomon, Patsey and other slaves would make it more difficult to understand why they endured their suffering.

Steve McQueen and John Ridley’s representation of black women’s vulnerability is both important and problematic. On a couple of occasions, the film deviates from the original story. In the film Eliza is about to get raped by a sailor on the boat to the south when Robert (Michael K. Williams) a male detainee, attempts to protect her and got killed in the process. In Northup’s memoir Robert died from smallpox. Patsey never asked Solomon to kill her or to allow him to flog her in the

⁶<http://wordsofkatrina.blogspot.com/2014/02/for-thirty-years-man-for-twelve-years.html>

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memoir. What is added as well is the scene where a light-skinned woman mounts Solomon for a silent and joyless sexual act and that is not in the book either⁷.

However it is said that there were good representations as “It is rare, in most films about slavery, to be confronted with black men, women and children with something to lose apart from their miserable lives”, but in *Twelve Years a Slave* the flashbacks of Solomon and his family shown in freedom remind us that they “had everything to lose”. Therefore this helps up to “remember what Patsey and the other slaves born into bondage, could have had and been, had it not been for slavery”. This shows that the representation of Solomon’s life beforehand is important because it allows the audience to understand what it would have been like if it were not for slavery at that time.

Steve McQueen succeeded in Bringing out the universally human in his characters and, through Solomon, Eliza and Patsey, he is reminding us of the humanity of the millions of faceless and nameless victims of the transatlantic slave trade. In a non-sensationalist manner, without super-heroes and special effects, he has allowed us not just to be horrified, but to emphasize it too.

This shows that McQueen did succeed overall in his representations as he allowed the audience to focus along with the horror of the slave trade, which shows good representation because he has shown what awful experiences innocent slaves had to endure in the past.

2.6- The Different Significations of Solomon Northup’s Memoir

In Solomon Northup’s book *Twelve Years a Slave*, an important value is taken into the cultural aspect of slavery displayed by Solomon narrative history in his life as a slave, he described the way male and female slaves were treated; under violence, desecration of families and slave worker situation.

⁷<http://blogs.grammar.sch.gg/daniellebateman/2014/07/06/the-debate-about-the-realism-an-violence-in-12-years-a-slave/>

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2.6.1- Violence

The book *Twelve Years a Slave* is one of the most realistic stories that shows a clear image and description of slavery status, from the point of view of the slave himself. A very expressive feeling of violence took part in center of Northup's narrative. He asserted that the slave owner's power was only saved by terrorizing the enslaved black people; that they own with unmerciful psychological and physical whip, violence, puddles and shackles. Especially in Solomon Northup's description of his life as a new kidnapped free black man, they took off his clothes and nailed him to the floor, Solomon kept bearing the beat of the whip over his naked body and after he awoke as a slave. His masters stop only to ask if the slave accepted his new situation, as Solomon recollected;

‘As soon as these formidable whips appeared, I was seized by both of them, and roughly divested of my clothing. My feet, as has been stated, were fastened to the floor [...]. With the paddle, Burch commenced beating me. Blow after blow was inflicted on my naked body. When his unrelenting arm grew tired, he stopped and asked if I still insisted I was a free man. I did insist upon it, and then the blows were renewed, faster and more energetically, if possible, than before’.
(p. 44-45)

It was only after the cruel and relentless violence that masters took over him; Solomon was finally silenced to accept his new status as a slave. Solomon has also detailed the violence that was over a slave girl called Patsey, who was a victim of a brutal master and his jealous mistress wife, the girl was grasped between her mistress wrath and also the sexual abuse under her master. Patsey lived her life in fear and agony as Solomon said:

If [Patsey] uttered a word in opposition to her master's will, the lash was resorted to at once, to bring her to subjection; if she was not watchful about her cabin, or when walking in the yard, a billet of wood, or a broken bottle perhaps, hurled from her mistress's hand, and

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would smite her unexpectedly in the face. The enslaved victim of lust and hate, Patsey had no comfort of her life (p 189).

Although Patsey was a faithful worker known by her hands in picking cotton in the field but, she was living a torment under the anger of a jealous mistress; the wife of her master Edwin Epps⁸.

“.. He ordered her to be striped of every article of dress, Ropes were then brought, and the naked girl was laid upon her face, her wrists and feet each tied firmly to a stake. Stepping to the piazza, he took down a heavy whip, and placing it in my hands, commanded me to lash her.[...] “Strike harder, or your turn will come next, you scoundrel,” he yelled. “Oh mercy, massa!__oh! Have mercy, do. Oh, God! Pity me,” Patsey exclaimed continually, struggling fruitlessly, and the flesh quivering at every stroke” (p. 255-256).

Patsey suffered from Epps’ unreasonable anger in front of his jealous mistress wife Marry. Epps forced Platt to whip Patsey’s naked body harshly otherwise, he would be whipped too.

2.6.2 The Desecration of the Family

Solomon Northup has also detailed about family’s desecration of female slave who faced and suffered from their children’s separation. Solomon mentioned the intensive emotion of the mother slave at the auction block, relating the unmerciful slave traders who do not care about the feeling of mothers’ slaves when they are separated from their children. Solomon has the example of a female slave called Eliza, who was grieved so much after she had been separated forcibly from her two young kids, Eliza felt herself living in dark hell when they bought her children instead of her. As Solomon noted;

All the time the trade was going on, Eliza was crying aloud, and wringing her hands. She besought the man not to buy [her child],

⁸<http://ushistoryscene.com/article/12-years-a-slave/>

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unless he also bought herself and [her other small child]. She promised, in that case, to be the most faithful slave that ever lived. The man answered that he could not afford it, and then Eliza burst into a paroxysm of grief, weeping plaintively (p 81).

The female mother slave was forced always to face the reality of leaving their children someday soon, the black women suffered from the psychological emotion of the separation from their own children in this ambiguous world in the American slave trade. From showing the abuse of black women who were suffering from the physiological torment, sexual terror and separation of families during slavery, briefly they were objects. Solomon's narration was able to touch the feeling of any antislavery in the northern states before the civil war by displaying the horror over the innocent victims⁹.

Solomon Northup's family was also a real example of family desecration; when he was suddenly kidnapped and disappeared away from his family leaving them confused, not knowing if he were still alive or not. Then, they lived twelve years of suffering, till he comes home. In fact, he feels like a stranger, to find many things have changed; his daughter married and got a baby named in the honor of his grand-father Solomon,

As I entered their comfortable cottage, Margaret was the first that met me, she did not recognize me [...] was married, with a bright-eyed boy standing by her side, not forgetful of his enslaved, unfortunate grandfather, she had named the child Solomon Northup Staunton (p 319-320).

Northup, his wife and children have to reconstruct their twelve years ago destroyed family, because of slavery's mercilessness

When the violence of our emotions had subsided to a scared joy – when the household gathered round the fire, that sent out, its warm

⁹<http://ushistoryscene.com/article/12-years-a-slave/>

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and crackling comfort through the room, we conversed of the thousand events that had occurred – the hopes and fears, the joy and sorrows, the trials and troubles we had each experienced during the separation (p 320).

Once again Solomon started to rebuild his new family after all these missing years under slavery.

2.6.3 Plantation work

The third major point to Solomon Northup's narration is the fixed and non-stop hard works of plantation, a real image that Solomon catch in his description of labor life on the plantation of Louisiana, that shows a clear exhaustion and fear in which every single slave suffered from, as Solomon recalled:

An hour before daylight the horn is blown. Then the slaves arouse, prepare their breakfast, fill a gourd with water [...] and hurry to the field again [...]. Then the fears and labors of another day begin; and until its close there is no such thing as rest. He fears he will be caught lagging through the day; he fears to approach the gin house with his basket-load of cotton at night; he fears, when he lies down, that he will oversleep himself in the morning. Such is a true, faithful, unexaggerated picture and description of the slave's daily life, during the time of cotton-picking on the shores of Bayou Beouf (p 171).

After a brutal beating of paddle and a rope used by his master; the slave trader Burch, Solomon was silenced to accept his new identity as a slave. Solomon's continuous description of slave's daily life was a meaningful picture which displayed their emotional and physical suffering from oppression and fear.¹⁰

¹⁰<http://ushistoryscene.com/article/12-years-a-slave/>

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2.7- *Twelve Years a Slave* the Book vs. the Movie

Steve McQueen's masterpiece *Twelve Years a Slave* is a dramatic movie based on the memoir of Solomon Northup that reveals what happened to Solomon, a free black man living in New York, that was kidnapped and sold into slavery before he was able to regain his freedom more than a decade ago, but the film has derived from the original script yet it remained loyal to it, we will project some of those similarities and differences in the following passages.

2.7.1- The Similarities and Differences between the Book and the Movie

The book has a lot of information from Solomon's cunning ways for survival to a very detailed description of agriculture in the Red River area. It would be very hard to include all the details of the book in the film. Some of the characters were omitted, some were interchanged, there were numerous different details, but overall the book and the movie were very close¹¹.

Right from the beginning of the film the difference is shown for Solomon had two kids Margaret (8) and Alonzo (5), but in the book it is stated that he had a third girl named Elizabeth (10).

The movie paints William Ford as a hypocrite, contradicting his Christian sermons when he ignored Eliza's agonizing screams when she got separated from her family, during the time that Ford wanted to buy Solomon and Eliza and her girl but the slave merchant Theophilus Freeman refused to sell the little girl and Ford had to buy the mother alone. In Northup's memoir he offers the utmost words of kindness for his former master, stating that "there never was a more kind, noble, candid, Christian man than William Ford" (p90)

In the book, Solomon Northup described a number of incidents that occurred when he was being transported to the Southern U.S, like how he and his fellow

¹¹<http://screenrant.com/12-years-slave-movie-book-differences-true-story-fact-fiction/>

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prisoners planned a misted-style revolt, before one of them fell ill and died from Smallpox, in the movie, the slaves did not revolt they accepted their situation and one of Solomon's peers advised him to keep his head down.

In the movie, Northup attempts to reason with Ford, explaining that he is actually a free man. Ford states that he "cannot hear this"(00: 53) and responds "I have a debt to be mindful of"(00:53) on Northup's purchase price. In the book, Northup carefully explains a couple of times why he never let Ford know he was a free man.

In the film, Northup is given the violin by Ford. In reality, no mention is made in the book of where he got his violin. Likewise, there's no mention made of him destroying his violin, as he does in the film after he is forced to whip Patsey. So where did he get it? He may very well have purchased it himself—in Louisiana, by law, slaves got to keep any money made from labour on Sundays. Northup's fiddling skills were enjoyed by people all over the area, and he was paid for his performances at parties.

By the way, the money made for Sunday work was what slaves used to purchase all of their possessions: clothing, a cup to drink from, a bowl to eat from, utensils, shoes, etc. Those were not provided for them. (Schaefer, 2013)

Edwin Epps the man who owned Solomon Northup for nearly a decade is described in Solomon's memoir as being as detestable and menacing as he is portrayed in McQueen's film, Patsey, the hard working slave that is frequently abused by Epps and his jealous wife, "Mistress Epps was not naturally such an evil woman, after all. She was possessed of the devil, jealousy, it is true, but aside from that, there was much in her character to admire"(p 284). In the movie she was not shown to have any good qualities. She was mean, nasty, and uncultured.

Patsey told Solomon about how she was inspired to live on by her belief in goodness elsewhere in the world and dreams of finding her freedom in the Northern US, but in the movie, McQueen in one scene pictured how Patsey asked Solomon to kill her and that did not happen in reality.

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McQueen also did not show Mistress Mary McCoy, the new owner of the Bayou Boeuf plantation (Epps plantation); in the book Solomon described her as being a goodhearted, an angel of kindness

This estate is now owned by Miss Mary McCoy, a lovely girl, some twenty years of age. She is the beauty and the glory of Bayou Bœuf. She owns about a hundred working hands, besides a great many house servants, yard boys, and young children. Her brother-in-law, who resides on the adjoining estate, is her general agent. She is beloved by all her slaves, and good reasons indeed have they to be thankful that they have fallen into such gentle hands (p 285)

All slave-owners on Bayou Boeuf are not like Epps, or Tibbeats, or Jim Burns. Occasionally can be found, rarely may be, indeed, a good man like William Ford, or an angel of kindness like young Mistress McCoy who did not appear in the movie. It would have been an interesting contrast to the horrors of Epps.

The film *Twelve Years a Slave* skips a very intriguing chapter from Solomon's memoir, where he recounts how Henry B. Northup a lawyer and the "relative of the family in which my forefathers were thus held to service, and from which they took the name I bear" was the one contacted by the Canadian Bass (Brad Pitt) and ended up being responsible for Solomon's rescue. (p.289)

In the movie, there is one scene where we could see one of Solomon's friends who showed up and got Solomon back from slavery, while in the book, it is stated that it took five months till they found him because the letter sent but Bass did not contain any names or addresses, but Northup's friends searched and found Bass who told them about the exact location of Solomon, so they worked night and day in order to get the right papers, this involved waking up a sheriff and a judge in the middle of the night, then arranging for the sheriff to accompany them to Epps's plantation to rescue Northup¹².

¹² <http://www.everseradio.com/top-five-differences-book-film-12-years-slave/>

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2.7.2- The Issue of Faithfulness¹³

The astonishing memoir of a free man who was sold into slavery in Louisiana, where he was kept for twelve years, a powerful, riveting condemnation of slavery, where he faced a lot of ups and downs, from a slave-owner to another till he was rescued, the book was left in shadows for many years until Steve McQueen, the Black British filmmaker come in 2013 to turn it into a masterpiece, the historical drama centered about Solomon Northup, went worldwide and won over 234 awards both in the US and abroad.

The movie gained also a lot of criticism and credibility, because it artfully re-wrote history and because it closely followed an already well written story, however, there were few minor changes from paper to screen, probably it was an effort to keep the film at a reasonable length, also, there are a lot of little things, much of the daily brutality of slavery over the decade were omitted and various facts were changed, those facts however, were not decisive about the story's integrity, we do not really mind that Patsey and Mistress Shaw never had tea, or that Solomon had three kids instead of two, it does not matter much that Mary Epps did not throw a decanter at Patsey's face, or that Solomon did not actually say goodbye to his wife and children before being sold into slavery.

We must say that the film is an unusually faithful adaptation of the book. They did not change much, just condensed and simplified to fit it into the film. But scenes played out almost identically with those in the book, even the dialogue, which is why the language feels so authentic for the time rather than being in 21st century language, so we can say that Steve McQueen's version of Solomon Northup's *Twelve Years a Slave* was very close to the original script and it won the credibility of all who have watched the movie and read the book.

McQueen's project is a technically well-made film about a man's quest to survive, which tends to indulge in showing the ugliness of slavery. Yet, McQueen's *12*

¹³This part is a mixture between personal remarks with the help of the following website <http://storycartel.com/blog/film-version-12-years-slave-differ-book/>

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Years a Slave forgoes teaching some of the most important lessons to be gained from looking back at history (which are the true reasons we should never forget what happened in the past).

Accurate stories about slavery—or, more precisely, stories that carried the conviction of accuracy, were vital to the abolitionist cause. And, for that matter, they are still vital. Outright lies about slavery and its aftermath, from *Birth of a Nation* to *Gone with the Wind*, have defaced American cinema for a long time. To go forward more honestly, we need accounts of our past that, like the slave narratives themselves, use accuracy and art in the interest of being truer. That is what McQueen, Ejiofor, and the rest of the cast and crew tried to do in *12 Years a Slave*. Pointing out the complexity of the task is not meant to belittle their attempt, but to honor it.

2.8- Conclusion

Solomon Northup's *Twelve Years a Slave* is a wonderful account of the life of Solomon after being enslaved till he was freed, while Steve McQueen's *Twelve Years a Slave* historical Drama is the most perfect representation of slavery in a movie that was ever made.

In this chapter, we dealt with both the book and the movie, we have spoken about how Solomon's process of writing the memoir, how he was able to publish it, and then we moved on to Steve McQueen's movie, we spoke about how he was able to find Solomon Northup's memoir, and how he transformed it into a script with the help of John Ridley, how he designed and filmed the movie, ending up by the awards that the film had won.

Then after the projection of the movie, we dealt with the debate about realism and violence in the film, we spoke about the violence, the plantation work and the discrimination of the family, and we moved on and tried to have a comparison between the book and the movie, and tried to project the differences and the similarities between them, and finally, we tried to answer our main questions about whether the movie was faithful to the script or not.

General Conclusion

General Conclusion

Slavery is an important issue in the history of America. In a time were America was facing huge developments in economics, they needed workers to labor the lands, so they found that the African slaves were more affordable laborers then the indentured servants who were mainly composed of the poor and the vulnerable Europeans.

Slavery is the worst system of forced labor that the world has ever known. It started around the 17th century in the American colonies, so we may say that slavery appeared in the time of the economic foundation of the country.

Slaves have developed their own traditions, culture and literature, and we witnessed the birth of a new genre of literature that is known as the slave narrative genre; most of the writings were autobiographies of former slaves, where they depicted the horror they suffered from when being enslaved till their freedom.

Solomon Northup's autobiography was the selected narrative under study. It is the story of a free black man from New York who got kidnapped into slavery for 12 years till he was rescued and got back into his family. Solomon Northup is one of the many black people who got kidnapped into slavery but he is among those few who managed to get their freedom again.

This fascinating story has moved Steve McQueen; the British black filmmaker and John Ridley the screen writer, to transform this book into a movie, and that is what they did. In 2013, they managed to give us one of the most influential and best films about slavery in America. The movie won the hearts of everyone that was able to watch it and managed to change their view about the dark history of America.

The movie differs from the book in some ways but is quite the same in other ways. While adopting an existing story, filmmakers make choices about what to include and what to ignore, because they cannot put the entire book as a script, that will make the movie long and boring, McQueen preferred to omit some of the details that did not interfere in the process of the movie and did not change it a lot.

General Conclusion

We may say that the film is an unusual faithful adaptation of the book, for they did not change much; the scenes are almost identical to the book, so we may say that McQueen's film version of Solomon Northup's narrative *12 Years a Slave* is very close to the original script.

Slave narratives or the liberator narratives are the result of a brutal system that forced to shape the nation's history resulting into a huge amount of literary legacy that is still influencing people everywhere, and Solomon Northup's memoir *12 Years a Slave* is considered to be one of those works that influenced another black man, the British filmmaker Steve McQueen, to adopt it into a movie, and it was very loyal to the original script, getting a lot of credit for his work, and winning prizes here and there making it one of the most influential movies about slavery in America.

This research work's aim was to see what slave narratives are and shed light on one of the most influential ones written by Solomon Northup and adapted by the British filmmaker Steve McQueen, in an attempt to see faithfulness of the movie as compared to the narrative and focus on some major points such as violence, desecration of family and hard labour.

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