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Taurog's 1931 Adaptation of Twain's *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*: An Existential Reality of America in the 1860's

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Abstract

Adaptation studies gained a renewed focus on the understanding of the mutations contained in the area of film adaptation namely by drawing on theorists like Linda Hutcheon and Robert Stam. This being the case, studying the film adaptation is to work as a platform to detect the social, political and cultural changes of the history. Twain's *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* as a nationally definitive work for the American literature has been persistently adapted to films since the advent of cinema. Mostly these adaptations occur at specific historical times in American history like Taurog's adaptation of *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1931) that studies the existential reality of the novel during the 1860s. And as adaptation studies, in this perspective, expand the horizon for cultural materialists who investigatethe historicity of the text, the type of thinking that is promoted in this study is how the film adaptation ideologically has challenged the core of this nationally definitive text of American literature to further probe into the social and historical issues of the time of adaptations.

Keywords: *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, adaptation studies, great depression, American dream, cultural materialism, existential reality, Taurog

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1. Introduction

The importance of literary adaptation studies in the twenty-first century has increased considerably due to the new perspective that has reoriented the position of literary film adaptation from the concern of fidelity to such questions as why and how a literary film adaptation is produced. Given the ways, Hutcheon assesses the realm of adaptation as a "repetition without replication" (2014: 8), Francesco Casetti edges further in the light of repetition without a mere replication and emphasizes that film and literature have the same basis of not having a simple sense of a re-reading or a re-writing but the potentiality of a "reappearance, in another discursive field" (2004: 82). Borrowing David Damrosch's concise definition of 'world literature' that considers "all literary works that circulate beyond their culture of origin, either in translation or in their original language" (2003: 20) as world literature, the researchers argue that Twain's *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* that has captured the center of attention in different times in the United States, has achieved the merit to be well circulating around the world as world literature. *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* is to be positively labelled as part of world literature with readers from across the world. Moreover, being part of world literature means being accorded with "the quality of "gaining" in translation, and the capacity to "estrange" us from the axiomatic norms of our home culture" (2003: 20). Not only has Twain's *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* been able to be part of world literature, but it has also been qualitative enough to "trigger a move beyond suffocating provincialities to achieve a free-breathing universality" (2003: 22). Twain's *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, is believed to establish one of America's mythic grounds as "figured most frequently in a bond between a young white man and an older, sympathetic black companion" (2003: 25), it has been likewise circulated around the world through literary film adaptation and has further promoted the notion of freedom through its universal portrayal. The process of extracting key features by filmmakers from this book in order to be distilled into a film adaptation has never ceased because more and more films have worked on the innumerable controversial features of this book. Likewise, Taurog's adaptation of Twain's *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* produced in the closing year of the 1940s a time when America is trying to recover from the suffering of the Great Depression.

James Truslow Adams published his *The Epic of America* around the time Taurog released his adaptation of Twain's *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. Adams' perspective of Great Depression and American dream could be revealing of both the situation of the time and the orientation of this film adaptation. Adams defines American dream that has attracted many individuals worldwide "as a dream of a social order in which each man and each woman shall be able to attain to the fullest stature of which they are innately capable" (1933: 317). Nevertheless, what Adamas focus on is that American dream is not "a dream of merely material plenty, though that has doubtless counted heavily" (318). For Adams, to merely confine the concept

of American dream to materialism is a misappropriation of the idea:

> If the American dream is to come true and to abide with us, it will, at bottom, depend on the people themselves. But, unless we settle on the values of life, we are likely to attack in a wrong direction and burn the barn to find our penny in the hay. (322)

Undoubtedly when a film is produced at such a time, it is reproduced with regard to the present reality in which it is situated, while connecting it with the presence in which the film is produced which is the America of the third decade of the twentieth century. And as a direct parallel to this statement which is an investigation of sociocultural and historical conditions of America in the 1940s the study at hand shifts to cultural materialists to better underscore the historicity of the film. Since literary films like literary works are no longer "a stable set of reflections of historical facts that lie beyond them" (Greenblatt 1980: 6).

2. Objective of the Study

This study seeks to investigate the process of adaptation in film studies, particularly in the context of literary adaptations and within the bastion of cultural materialism. As such, cultural materialism being an ever-changing discourse related with sociocultural circumstances, provides the literary adaptation studies with a theoretical basis that opens its wings pointedly to the adapted films in their new nest. The study aims to analyze how film adaptation of Twain's *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* reflect and challenge the core of the nationally definitive American literature text in relation to the social and historical issues of the time of adaptations. Hence, the study examines the cinematic adaptation, *Huckleberry Finn,* by Taurog (1931) to understand how it reflects and challenges the core of the text in relation to the social and historical issues of the time of the adaptation.

3. Significance of the Study

The significance of the study lies in approaching Taurog's *Huckleberry Finn* (1931) adaptation of Twain's *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* with the lenses of cultural materialism and literary adaptation theories. In this regard, it is detected that the director is extending the notion of the abolitionist movement occurring at the time of the first publication of the novel. With this in mind, if the notions of cultural materialism are central in revealing the pages of the past to people in the present time, they mainly aim at proving that political and ideological systems manipulate images and texts of the past to serve their own interests. On this purpose, the two concepts of the past and the present that are intertwined in the 1931 film adaptation are the American Dream embedded in the time of the Great Depression and the abolitionist movement.

4. Literature Review

As an academic research on the adaptation studies of *The Adventure of Huckleberry Finn*, Robert Irwin attempts to present the difficulty of producing films out of Twain's works. For Irwin, the first problem that arises regarding Twain's adaptation is the difficulty of finding a suitable child to play the role of Huck or Tom because "they must be able to recapture the spirit of the small pleasures and rebellions of childhood while they are filmed in the spirit of a million-dollar Hollywood production" (1967: 9). After presenting the difficulties of selecting a suitable child to play the role of Tom in the 1938 version of *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*, Irwin admits that it is inevitable to avoid adapting successful literary works to films because they have been good money making subjects for Hollywood; "take a book, a classic if one is available, twist it around, feminize it, give it a junior sex-appeal, and make it as warm as Grandma's fireplace if you have to, but above all make money" (10).

Robert Stam attempts to correct the misunderstanding regarding the notion of fidelity by referring to the projection of a novel to the film as one's imagination out of many possible ones. Therefore, if one specific adaptation is not matched with our imagination of the book, this never means that the film has been an unfaithful adaptation of the book. Hence there should be a change of attention from the fidelity of the book to the process of the adaptation. Therefore, the change of perspective is necessary with regard to filmic adaptations; "the demand for fidelity ignores the actual processes of filmmaking- for example, the difference in cost and in modes of production" (2000: 56).

Donald Ingram Ulin opens up the discussion of *Huckleberry Finn* with regard to a successful Shawshank Redemption which is an adapted film based upon Stephen King's *Rita Hayworth and Shawshank Redemption*. Ulin brings up the tradition that is founded by Twain and continued by other American writers. A tradition that is now part of American's repertoire of myths. Ulin asserts that one of American's mythic bases "is that of the possibility of interracial friendship, figured most frequently in a bond between a young white man and an older, sympathetic black companion" (2013: 25). After outlining and explicating a body of adapted films produced out of *The Adventure of Huckleberry Finn,* Ulin concludes that *Huckleberry Finn* has been successful in creating a biracial escape narrative and this "created opportunities for writers, directors, and audiences to revisit the same unresolved issues with more freedom than might be possible with even a relatively loose adaptation" (4). Then, Ulin points out the main distinction between Stephen King's *Rita Hayworth and Shawshank Redemption* and *The Shawshank Redemption* which casts Red as a black. In this way, the director has been careful to situate his film "in the powerful tradition of the biracial escape narrative going back through *The Defiant Ones* to *Huckleberry Finn* and beyond" (8). Even though, Ulin mentions King's disagreement with the change of Red as a black, this tactful modification is made possible through a skillful adaptation of the literary book. Ulin wraps up his article with a remarkable concluding argument regarding the biracial escape narrative that portrays a path already begun

by *Huckleberry Finn* and ending with *The Shawshank Redemption*. For this purpose, Ulin highlights how the director has attempted to show the time dragging behind in the prison and then to depict the escape from there at the end of film as an escape "from the stop-time of the prison back into the time-flow of the real world, but out of time, memory, and ultimately history altogether" (17). What Ulin is trying to convey is that the ending of *The Shawshank Redemption* is a new beginning out of the real history and the related mythopoetics. For Ulin, "the history of biracial escape narratives beginning with *Huckleberry Finn* has been a history of attempted escapes from history itself — paradoxically so, insofar as each reflects the psychosocial needs of audiences at its own moment in time" (17).

Moulavinafchi et al in a recent article have studied the narrative of the Cold War in Georgiy Daneliya's *Hopelessly Lost* (1973) which is a film Adaptation of Twain's *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* produced in Soviet Union. Apart from focusing on the political orientation of the film adaptation and how they are adapting those parts of the novel that captures the grim reality of the inevitable downfall of the United States, they indicate how Twain's *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* as a nationally definitive work has been reproduced in the film industry at certain critical times in history.

5. Theoretical Framework and Method

Linda Hutcheon has commenced her seminal book, *A Theory of Adaptation*, by claiming that adaptations are to be found anywhere "on the television and movie screen, on the musical and dramatic stage, on the Internet, in novels and comic books, in your nearest theme park and video arcade" (2014: 2). Her claim is not to be challenged but to be substantiated if one inspects closely their digital surrounding to feel the presence of various types of adaptations. However, the concept of adaptation echoed in academic spaces is tightly attached with film adaptations or more precisely with how novels are adapted into films. Concerning which Dennis Lehane, an American novelist, whose novels have been repeatedly adapted into films, once suggested on the question of the realm of adaptation that "Literature and film, movies and books, compare like apples and giraffes" (McCabe 2006: 9). Though novels have been recurrently turned into films, these two are distinct forms that are rooted in a common soil which is re-narrations. Stories are themselves repeated in the line of history with regard to each generations' needs and necessities which is in line with what Stephen Greenblatt calls "the circulation of social energy" (Greenblatt 1988: 120). The cultural and contextual conditions and forces of each historical era overdetermine the production of those eras to be given the "surplus of meaning" (120). As such, stories are mainly renewed with respect to the needs of the societies. And by the ushering and spreading of romantic ideas the notion of the self-made author in the nineteenth century, this notion became firmly fixed in the European tradition:

> The originality, stylistic authority and proprietary rights of a composer and a composition became a major factor in the production, adaptation, and consumption of culture. This was capped by a new sense of individualism, a term and concept which did not come into common use in the English language until the early 1800s. One result was the "self-made" author who could make a living from his writings and was deservedly proud that he could do so by selling his work to the public and did not have to toady to patronage. (Dean 2009: 7)

And this account captured the attention of much of the twentieth century until the turning point occurred in the twenty first-century when revised with a new perspective added to it; "adaptation is repetition, but repetition without replication" (Hutcheon 2014: 4). This means that adaptation studies are a departure from picturing the film as a fixed preconceived notion or a byproduct to be followed on the screen. Hereby, the viewer is to watch and detect a work that "has been called both appropriation and salvaging, depending on your perspective" (Hutcheon 2014: 4). It is within the bounds of this definition that the term adaptation shall be considered. As such, it might be asked: how does the process of adaptation occur? What form of intertextuality is resonated there? And besides these two questions, there remains our focus on novels being adapted to film since as George Bluestone discussed that a novel is "protean because it has assimilated essays, letters, memoirs, histories, religious tracts, and manifestoes" (1957: 5). In other words, our main attempt is to follow the adaptations of novels into films as novels are inevitably modified into an adapted film "especially from long novels, mean that the adapter's job is one of subtraction or contraction; this is called 'a surgical art'" (Abbott 2021: 108). Abbot has delicately applied the term 'a surgical art' to refer to all the nuances an adapted film undergoes until it is produced and displayed on the screen, such is the importance of one medium transformed into another medium. All this is not to demean adaptation studies whether to prove that "transposition to another medium, or even moving within the same one, always means change or, in the language of the new media, 'reformatting'. And there will always be both gains and losses (Stam 2000a: 62). Thus, Robert Stam in this seminal work on film studies entitled *Film and Theory: An Anthology* tries to bring up the web through which one adaptation study is shaped ultimately:

> For the reader, spectator, or listener, adaptation as adaptation is unavoidably a kind of intertextuality if the receiver is acquainted with the adapted text. It is an ongoing dialogical process, as Mikhail Bakhtin would have said, in which we compare the work we already know with the one we are experiencing (2000b: 64).

The dynamics through which Stam attempts to build for the adaptation studies contain a wide array of factors that are always and inevitably in the process of influencing each other. The center of adaptation studies, he wisely expresses to be like Bakhtin's dialogical field which is a board filled with forces affecting each other.

Inevitably, when a novel is called upon to be adapted to a film, the main story may get transposed into the received setting of time and place and be gauged ideologically with regard to the new setting. Corollary to this perspective Stam who believe that literary adaptations "feed on and is fed into an infinitely permutating intertext, which is seen through ever-shifting grids of interpretation" (2000a: 57). As changes from the text to the film are unavoidable, various orientations from novel to film are also inevitable. Therefore, film adaptations, "are caught up in the ongoing whirl of intertextual reference and transformation, of texts generating other texts in an endless process of recycling, transformation, and transmutation, with no clear point or origin" (2000a: 66).

Moreover, given the close lens on adaptation studies, one can clearly notice that adaptation always occurs in a context which is "a time and a place, a society and a culture; it does not exist in a vacuum" (Hutcheon 142) and while examining the scope of context, one can notice that "fashions, not to mention value systems, are context-dependent" (142), and an adaptation changes its character according to the physical format in which it is presented. In a similar spirit, when a literary work is produced in the romantic era in England, its film adaptation in a specific era in America is unavoidably affected by the new setting of time and place. Probably, the work may be affected by prevailing American tenets like the American West and the American Dream; needless to justify the reason why Shakespeare has travelled to different places around the world and has been adapted differently in each of those places. In other words, when a literary work is taken to different places, it dramatically changes "its character according to the physical format in which it is presented" (142). For cultural materialists, the scenario of "self-fashioning" is consisted of signifying systems that are crucial in shaping the individual and collective identity or what Eric Fromm describes as "social character" (1962). This being the case, the key function of cultural materialism in Dollimore and Sinfield's terms is "the main effect of cultural production will generally be the reproduction of an existing order" (1994: 155).

As such, the field of adaptations is not limited to the relations between the place in which the work is produced and the place in which the work is reproduced whereas "often very short stretches of it, can change the context even within the same place and culture" (Hutcheon 143). The specificity of the time reflects minutely on the details of the society in which the work is produced, however in the case of another specific time of reproduction, the work may hinge on details already scattered in the previous work. As such, the change of time in the adaptation can contribute to the understanding of the details distilled in the literary works but neglected due to the fact of being obvious to the original reader. Given that the issue of time is critical in the new context of the produced adapted work, "it also has the ability to make us forget, of course, but we may not ever have known things like details from a temporal context that could be relevant to issues of power" (145). While the concept of place and time are shifted to a new context in the adapted work, they are

mainly adapted in connection with the structure of the power existing within the new context. Bearing on this relation existing between the conditions and the political system, "almost always, there is an accompanying shift in the political valence from the adapted text to the "transculturated" adaptation. Context conditions meaning, in short" (147). In a similar vein, cultural materialists follow the same goals when they prioritize objectives over others: "not essence but potential, not the human condition but cultural difference, not destiny but collectively defined goals" (Dollimore 1984: 27l). The context that creates meaning is the time and place that are attached with the new political system, nonetheless, the condition is not limited solely with the aforementioned factors whereas other racial and gender features are also modified along the trail of adaptation called transcultural adaptation. Therefore, a transcultural adaption includes a wide array of factors within their changes so much as "sometimes adapters purge an earlier text of elements that their particular cultures in time or place might find difficult or controversial; at other times, the adaptation "de-represses" an earlier adapted text's politics (Stam and Raengo 2004: 42)". To put it in Montrose's term, the new time and place redefines the meaning history from being progressive to be studies by a cultural materialist as "the textuality of history, [and] the historicity of texts" (1989: 20). In short, the reason behind the mix-up over the relationship of cultural materialism and adaptation studies, to quote Jonathan Dollimore and Alan Sinfield, is when individuals assume the importance of "the implication of literary texts in history" (1994: 7). As such, these two roads cross over when any attempt is made to read a literary text or adapted film "to the conditions in which they were and may be read" (1994: 99). When cultural materialists consider adaptations of Shakespeare's plays as the arena of cultural conventions that beget the fabric of social and cultural narrations of society that shape a new textuality; literary adaptation is situated with cultural materialism as it includes a re-contextualization of a literary text within a cinematic form with all its re-historicization of its sociocultural dimensions.

6. Research Questions

1. How does Taurog's 1931 adaptation of *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* reflect and challenge the core of this nationally definitive American literary text, particularly in relation to the social and historical issues of the time of the adaptation?
2. How are the two concepts of the American dream and the Great Depression reflected in Taurog's 1931 adaptation of Twain's *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*?
3. How does Taurog's 1931 adaptation of Twain's *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* study the existential reality of the 1840s?

7. Discussion

7.1. Twain's *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* and American Nationality

Twain's *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* has been persistently adapted to films since the advent of cinema[1] and thanks to its substantial adaptational record on film and television, one can follow various decades of accompanying critical discourse while reviewing these film adaptations. Mostly these adaptations occur at specific historical times in the American history and more obviously the occurrence of these adaptations is sided with the critical analysis of the book itself (Moulavinafchi et al. 2024: 83). The book has gained fame in specific times in American history as Jonathan Arac asserts that "it was not really until the years from 1948 to 1964 that *Huckleberry Finn* was plucked from Twain's oeuvre and idolized as the ultimate expression of American national culture" (qtd. in Knoper 2007: 14). This idolization never occurred in one year whereas its root developed from the 1940s and in Lionel Trilling's words who has published a series of essays on Twain's *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, the novel is to be called "one of the central documents of American culture" (2008:101). The gist of Trilling's studies focused on presenting the novel as a work matched with the post-Civil War and simultaneously orienting its ideals in what was "accepted and made respectable in the national ideal" (109). For Trilling, Twain is shaping the core of national ideals in the United States. Moreover, the book is not only provoking the American contemporary society but providing its future map. As such, one should expect a book like Twain's *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* to carry certain conflicts that cannot be easily resolved. Trilling believed that America is growing with contradiction and Twain's *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* is the best book that "epitomize this national contradiction" (111). Interestingly, Twain himself is mostly blamed for this contradiction as he himself has escaped the Civil War while his book is best representing the Civil War; "the story of why Mark Twain came to Nevada at all and began his writing career there has applications to other Sagebrush authors as well. To put it plainly, Twain was probably fleeing the Civil War" (Berkove 2007: 158). Altogether, the novel recasts this contradiction by bundling a variety of issues in itself. In this respect, it is no doubt that the book has attracted many directors' attentions as they can readily swim in Twain's world of contradictions and construct their own way of seeing the world while living in each era in American history, however, it should be added here that at certain times in history when America needed a cohesive notion of national character or American collective consciousness to construct a dominant ideology to cover the various ideologies existing in America, Twain's *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* was not given any distinguished and predominant place in "academic studies as academic criticism about Mark Twain that made claims about his exceptional 'Americanness' grew rarer" (Knoper 2007: 15). However, in later decades, the story of Huck Finn regained its place and returned to the center of attention "partly as pointed critiques of his writings that saw them as embodiments of dominant ideologies" (Knoper 2007: 15). Extracting key features from this book to be distilled into a film adaptation has never ceased as more and more films have worked on the innumerable controversial

features of this book. Likewise, Taurog's adaptation of Twain's *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* produced in the closing year of the 1940s a time when America was trying to recover from the suffering of the Great Depression. Undoubtedly when a film is produced at such a time, it is reproduced with regard to the present reality in which it is situated, while connecting it with the presence in which the film is produced which is the America of the third decade of the twentieth century. This being the case, one should refer back to the past and the way the past has reshaped itself into the presence. And as mentioned above, Twain's *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* offers a fruitful subject matter for a reconsideration of the past reality deployed by the historicized readings within the presence and out of the existential reality of the text. For this aim, a careful critical discussion will thoroughly explore the examples of reading the text historically to permit the critic to fully wrestle with the produced work within this historical period:

> The interpretive act of reading historically predicates a time period and a location and is grounded upon an assumption about the nature of performed and embodied art— that art exists in a network of contexts and crosscurrents of influence specific in time and place. Reading historically forces the interpreter to make decisions about which contexts to access and how to access them (Pittman 2016: 177).

This being the case, the need of grasping the significance of Taurog's Adaptation of *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1931) is fulfilled by digging up the channel through the time The Great Depression is destroying the greatness of American dream due to the economic downturn. Therefore, the reading which follows, makes an attempt to reread the past to understand the political context of the time and the ways in which the adaptation has aimed to change the present reality of American dream accordingly and salvage it from materialistic presentation.

7.2. The Existential Reality of Taurog's Adaptation of *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1931)

The 1931 film adaptation of Taurog's *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* unlike the novel begins with a shot in which Huck's teacher is calling the roll in the class while Huck is absent. When the teacher calls the names and no answer is provided by Huck, she reacts with a sigh to his absence and tries to present Huck as a bad example from which other students should take lesson; "Has any one seen Huckleberry Finn? I suppose he is down at the river associating with the raft man and other worthless people. Children, I want Huckleberry Finn to serve as an example to you, I want you to realize how he wasted his time" (00:02:14). Bearing on this perspective, the teacher brings up some other points regarding Huck which add to the humorous narrative of the film since the audience can readily follow the contrast between the model boy presented by the teacher and the one presented by Huck. In this regard, the teacher provides some facts regarding Huck; "I don't suppose, he

even knows gold was divided to three parts and I'm sure, he doesn't know Newton discovered the law of gravity but we mustn't get angry at him, we must feel sorry for him. Poor Huckleberry! He must be a very young unhappy boy" (00:02:17). The two points that are mentioned by the teacher are not the ones that Huck has the aim to follow because in the film, he will show that he is determined to learn a good way of living by standing at Jim's side who is a black person devoid of the basic rights of the living. And these are the subjects that are not taught and learnt in the institutions of the time. But Huck is the boy who is going to learn these subjects by himself. Indeed, Huck is playing the role of a new model boy out of the textual reality of the book while being associated with the existential reality of the time produced in book I by Twain. In other words, in terms of cultural materialism, Huck is beginning to be the other voice beside the hegemonic one issued by the institutions of the society. Upon the ushering of this viewpoint, Huck is forming one of the social dissidences against the dominant civilization. On this account, the need for some changes to be applied in the society is enormously implied by Huck. This being the case, the director in this film adaptation is studying the moments of difference and contradiction in the past and present forms of American culture regarding the issue of black and white people. This means that using the lenses of the present time the director is recasting late nineteenth century in order to track the progress of American success to its present time. Regarding Huck and Jim, the main critical encounter between these two, occurs when they meet each other after they are both running off from somebody, Jim from Miss Watson and Huck from his Pap. In the book when they accidentally face each other, Jim is frightened and reacts to Huck as follows:

> He looked pretty uneasy, and didn't say nothing for a minute.
> Jim: Then he says: "Maybe I better not tell."
> Huck: "Why, Jim?"
> Jim: "Well, dey's reasons. But you wouldn' tell on me ef I 'uz to tell you, would you, Huck?"
> Huck: "Blamed if I would, Jim."
> Jim: "Well, I b'lieve you, Huck. I—I *run off*."
> Huck: "Jim!"
> Jim: "But mind, you said you wouldn' tell—you know you said you wouldn' tell, Huck."
> Huck: Well, I did. I said I wouldn't, and I'll stick to it. Honest *injun,* I will". (Twain 2010: 46)

A basis of trust is formed between Huck and Jim which is a rare type of relationship at the existential reality of the book but a probable one that is proposed by Twain at the textual level of the book and a type of relationship that should develop for the future of America. Right at this time when Huck has gained the trust of Jim, he slightly implicates that there exists a movement in the society which is not supported by most of the people or at least by the hegemonic side of the society

> But still I will try to act as they do and help you (Jim) here by not informing others of your presence; People would call me a low-down Abolitionist and despise me for keeping mum—but that don't make no difference. I ain't agoing to tell, and I ain't a-going back there, anyways. So, now, le's know all about it" (60).

This is the only time that the word "Abolitionist" is repeated in the book while the film adaptation is filled with its repetitions and in fact, all the pivotal actions of the film revolve around this notion. As such, it is from this point that the film adaptation begins to delve into the existential reality of the novel. In the film, the notion of abolitionist is discussed for the first time when Huck and Jim are discussing the notion of slavery:

> Jim: I'm saving up enough money to buy my selves and when I get enough money to buy my selves, I'll hist straight for that free state and I'm going to see my wife and little Joy and I'm going to sling around and be free ... of course sometimes, I think it would be better to just up and leave. Huck: Oh, you shouldn't even think of such a thing. You belong to Mrs. Douglas. Jim: I know Huck, I'm her slave but sometimes, I can't wonder if it is right … Huck: Come on. That's abolitionist talk. (00:04:00)

Nevertheless, to develop the notion of abolitionism, the character of Jim is also changed from a submissive person obeying the orders to a thoughtful person who begins to question the restraints that are imposed on him. In this vein, their dialogue in the film adaptation is in contrast with the one that is indicated in the text. For example, in the excerpt brought above, Jim is beginning to wonder if it is right to be a slave or not, but Huck attempts to justify that being a slave is inevitable for Jim. The justification used by Huck is to compare being a slave to wearing a shoe; "Being slave is like having to wear a shoe, you got a accept it whether you like it or not" (00:04:03); however, Jim answers back and tells Huck that "if you didn't intend to wear shoes, why did you buy some like these" (00:04:03). This is a really clever point mentioned by Jim since Huck himself is not the boy to follow the rules that are predestined for him like going to school and studying as diligently as expected from him. In other word, it is by default and quite ironically presumed that these two characters are almost with the same aim in spite of the difference in their skin color.

In the train of actions that are bundled together in the film adaptation, the next modified act in comparison with the novel, is the moment when Huck's Pap enters the scene. He makes Huck read a book to see whether he has acquired the ability to read or not. Likewise, the scene in the film adaptation is the extension of the text which means the scene is entangling with the existential reality of the text. In the text of the novel, Huck is narrating his encounter with his Pap and is indicating that he has just read something related to General Washington and the wars when his father interrupts him by telling him how he has changed to a different person by gaining the ability to read books. Huck's Pap is irritated when he hears that Huck has

learned to read because he feels that he cannot control Huck anymore. In this respect, Pap can even resemble the teacher at the beginning of the film, like Pap the teacher symbolizing the institutional system of the time is concerned that if Huck avoids learning the specific subjects taught at school, he cannot be controlled any more. This is the implication which is also echoed in the film adaptation but the part which is different is the moment when Huck begins reading the book that is handed to him by pap. Huck reads a famous quote by General Washington which says; "the story of George Washington must serve to teach every young American the value of truth, bravery and goodness … we must at all time" (00:15:50). Not a quote by General Washington is uttered by Huck in the book and his name and the notion of wars are the only items discussed by Huck. Nevertheless, the way the book orients toward Washington's quote is implicating the point that Huck is the one taking Washington's words as his lesson to be followed not the lessons discussed by his teacher in the beginning of the film. Clearly, the director of the film adaptation is driving out a thread from the text and constructing a concept based on it; Huck is becoming a teacher of himself in this journey that he is going to take with Jim. He is going to receive a self-study of the abolitionist movement.

The other significant change applied to the text in the film adaptation is the scene when Pap is asking for money from Miss Douglass. The scene shifts to a slave auction scene in which slaves are bought and sold based on their characteristics. In a similar way, Huck's characteristics are examined by pap and he finalizes an offer for Miss Douglas which is eight hundred dollars:

> Miss Douglas: You'd be willing to keep so that you keep him, I suppose you just decided how much your son worth ... Pap: he is such a beauty, you get a better slave for their price but then I have to cope up with the people coming up to me and say… oh I hear your Huck can read and write too… well I guess about eight hundred dollars for all that ... it's a great deal of money for me to raise. Miss Douglass: when would you expect it? I'll give you a week. (Twain 344-346)

Eight hundred dollars is the exact same amount of money for which Jim has heard he is going to be sold by Miss Watson; "she could git eight hund'd dollars for me, en it 'uz sich a big stack o' money she couldn' resis'. De widder she try to git her to say she wouldn' do it" (46). As such, its juxtaposition with the offer proposed by pap is putting these two beside each other to show the outrageous act of slave auction. This scene is not part of the text and adding it to the film adaptation creates a good ambience for the audience to better grasp the outrageous act of slave auction as Huck, an innocent boy, is just treated like an object by pap. In the film adaptation, this is an epiphanic moment since Huck now can understand how it feels to be sold and bought like goods by others. The point that needs to be highlighted here is the place of the abolitionist movement in Huck's eyes. He is unconsciously delving into the hegemonic reality of the society, and each time he wants to act otherwise, he gets

frightened and thinks that he is committing something wrong. In fact, this feeling is controlling Huck until it is shaken off him by an authoritative figure later in the film.

As two fugitives, Huck and Jim cross ways in one path and take their journey alongside the Mississippi River together. And as in all the film adaptations of *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* and the text itself, their journey is interrupted by the appearance of two conmen, the Duke and the King. In the novel, Twain depicts their entrance as "they hadn't been doing nothing, and was being chased for it—said there was men and dogs a-coming. They wanted to jump right in" (123-124) which means they were escaping from some people in the land and they tried to join Huck and Jim in the raft, however, their intrusion into Huck and Jim's raft in the film adaption is not through the land but due to being expelled from a ship passing by their raft. For Huck, the raft is defined in this way; "there warn't no home like a raft, after all. Other places do seem so cramped up and smothery, but a raft don't. You feel mighty free and easy and comfortable on a raft" (120). This means the raft symbolizes freedom from civilization and constraint that are present in the land. Though the raft is destroyed by a freighter in the text of the novel, such an accident never occurs in the film adaptation. Nevertheless, the entrance of the Duke and the King to the raft is like the freighter wreaking havoc on the raft and bringing misery upon Huck and Jim. George Miller Beard in his seminal book entitled *American Nervousness: Its Causes and Consequences, a Supplement to Nervous Exhaustion (Neurasthenia)*, counts the causes leading to nervousness created among the American people by the advent of modern civilization. He claims it as follows: "The chief and primary cause of this development and very rapid increase of nervousness is modern civilization, which is distinguished from the ancient by these five characteristics: steam power, the periodical press, the telegraph, the sciences, and the mental activity of women" (2016: vi). In his sustained effort, Beard categorizes the factors that have brought about these changes including the steam power which can be referred to in the book as the moment that the freighter destroys the raft symbolizing freedom. Moreover, Beard adds that "the evil of American nervousness tends, within certain limits, to correct itself" (ix) and that is in line with what happens to the Duke and the King that are brought (in the film adaptation) by the freighter to the raft. These two personating the misery of European civilization are finally cleansed by the Americanness of America when Huck tells on them and they are arrested by the people to get tarred and feathered. Most probably, Twain had selected these two characters with a purpose which is to present a parody of European nobility though the existential reality of the time could not appreciate this selection. According to Doyno the idea of writing a parody of literature about European nobility and prison escapes may have seemed funny and nationalistic (or, at least, anti-European) to Twain, but the countless soldiers who had fought in the American Civil War and suffered in prison camps a relatively short time earlier, as well as the many families of soldiers who had died there, might not think the topic inherently amusing. (2007: 399)

Twain's *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* is written during the Civil War but to represent post-Civil War. Twain has particularly used these two characters in the thrust of the book to mock the European civilization as represented by the cunning and mischievous Duke and King. Also, this representation confirms the contrast between the American humor and the fake seriousness of European civilization. As such when the Duke attempts to present himself as "My great grandfather, the eldest son of the duke of Bridgewater, he threatened this country at the end of the century, it was here that I grew up torn from my highest state and despised by the cold world and now" (00:16:24), it becomes clear that Twain is attaching some faults to the European civilization and by making the Duke tell Jim and Huck that "But if you remind honor of my high state, you other me when you speak, call me your lordship, you got that son" (00:16:24). The sarcastic remark shows itself and reveals the point when Twain's humor is to attack European norms of civilizations:

> All three suggest that the thrust of American humor was to contrast European norms of civilization, politics, and beauty with American experiences in order to help carve out an exceptional American identity. In other words, incongruity forms the basis for a progressive and nationalistic, rather than a conservative, satire. (Camfield 2016: 508)

Twain's Mississippi in *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* is the tool that he uses to purge the American civilization from the negative influences of European civilization. Huck's journey alongside the river is the one that can lead to this aim. And this process of purging includes the recognition of the rights of Jim for Huck, the subject that is under serious purview in the film adaptation. Edging upon the greatness of the river, Jim is the one who sings a song about Mississippi:

> Mississippi, she is a strange and wonderous river, with her there is no pretend, she sings to me her song so strong, have faith for I'm your friend, said the lady, I'm your friend, Mississippi, I'm traveling down my river, I'm moving round the bend, my home is just the river, it's where I begin and end, said the lady, I'll be your friend. (00:24:16)

As it is clear, Jim is treating the Mississippi as Mother Nature, because she is the one character that can sympathize with Jim's entitlement to becoming a free man. Moreover, Mississippi is never formed or structured by rules and is always flowing and formless and regarding this feature, Twain delicately notes that even a great novelist cannot "generalize the nation but must simply capture on paper the people of his own place" (Knoper 12). Thus, the considerable number of adaptations produced out of *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* relates to the book being based on the theme of capturing the flowing moments in the lives of the American people, and accordingly, this capturing can continue with other people as it is truly recognized and performed by various directors around the world in their film adaptations of the novel.

8. Conclusion

The study of Taurog's adaptation of *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1931) film is centered on the understanding of how a link is incorporated in making a connection between the past and the present and to what extent it is beneficial in improving an understanding of the presence by politically and ideologically manipulating the cultural productions for the benefit of causing a change. Twain's *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* offers a fruitful subject matter for a reconsideration of the past reality deployed by the historicized readings within the presence and out of the existential reality of the text. The Great Depression shook the whole America from 1929 to 1931. Lionel Trilling once claimed that "Americans were losing a sense of self and being reduced to something less than full and complete human beings" (Hauhart 2015: 72). This is mainly due to the attachment of the notion of the American dream with national identity. When the Great Depression is controlling and constraining people's lives in America, one's aspiring notion framed in the concept of the American dream is also shattered. In this regard, the necessity of reviving the American dream in the time of the Great Depression became a matter of utmost importance. In this respect, America has begun its journey with an idea which is the American dream; "from the times of Columbus, Cortez, and John Smith, America has been an idea, or many ideas" (Jillson 2016: 150). Evidently, it is essential to establish a common platform that addresses the diverse ethical, cultural, linguistic, and political backgrounds of individuals with the goal being to unify all people around shared human values and moral principles, rather than focusing solely on their material and economic circumstances. Interestingly, the platform could not have been attached to anything specific and should have been all fluid flowing with different people. Taurog's adaptation of The *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1931) that is subsequently studying the existential reality of the novel during the time it was published in 1860s. This is in line with adaptation studies that attempt to revisit a literary text in a new form. The aesthetic new form which is a reflection of the literary text never moves in a static line with regard to the literary text but with a new orientation that exposes the nuances of the presentness. Once these mutations are stirred, the framework of cultural materialism is suited to broach the issues hidden in the literary text.

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Postscript

Historically, from the first adaptation of *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* which is a silent film entitled *Huckleberry Finn* (1920) to the most recent one entitled *The Peanut Butter Falcon (2019)* which is a modern and loose adaptation of Twain's The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn, fourteen films have been adapted from this great novel which can be counted chronologically as follows: *The Adventures of Huck Finn (1993 film), The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn (1939 film), The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn (1960 film), The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn (Climax!), Back to Hannibal: The Return of Tom Sawyer and Huckleberry Finn (1990), Hopelessly Lost, Huck and Tom (1918), Huckleberry Finn (1931 film), Huckleberry Finn (1974 film), Huckleberry Finn (1975 film), , Rascals and Robbers: The Secret Adventures of Tom Sawyer and Huckleberry Finn (1982)* and *Band of Robbers* (2015).

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