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**A Psycho-Thematic Reading of
Solomon Northup's *Twelve Years a Slave* (1853)**

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements
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Dedication

To my family.

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Abstract

The history of the United States is rampant with racism. Slavery is one form of it. Accordingly, black people were offensively, cruelly and brutally treated throughout their history in the US. Along their inferior journey, numerous African-American writers defied slavery and racism through a set of literary works, poetry and other artistic and creative tools. Thus, they responded with one of the prominent literary genre called “slave narratives”. Among their creative works is “*Twelve Years a Slave*” (1853) by Solomon Northup. This research work delves into Solomon Northup’s Psyche and analyses both the historical and literary facts in his story. It reflects upon all the psychological and physical aspects he experienced; from trauma, dehumanization to violence and oppression, which created a sense of otherness and revenge. Despite the disheartening and agony, his determination and willingness directed his fate to freedom.

Keywords: *Twelve Years a Slave*, Solomon Northup, slave narratives, psycho-thematic analysis.

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General Introduction

African-American literary studies and authors' substantial works served a significant role in the discovery of the African American culture and literature. During slavery, many blacks were illiterate and prohibited from education, yet those who could write and read had to keep it secretive in order to survive. However, they sought freedom and social justice through literary and artistic means. Although their attempts collided with various barriers, from their lack of writing, to facing inferiority, racism and slavery, they managed to present their stories and convey their struggles through their autobiographies.

African-Americans underwent an immense social change in history which contributed to the emergence of a significant genre of literature entitled "slave narratives"; a literary genre that highlighted African-Americans' sufferings and racial discrimination. It symbolized a restore of their dignity in addition to their protests against racism.

Hence, this research illustrates the contribution of Solomon Northup's widely known narrative story of "Twelve Years a Slave (1853)". In his biography, he accounts his journey into survival, faith and hope towards freedom and social justice. On the basis of these considerations, the current research questions have been formulated for the present study:

- What themes did Solomon Northup tackle in his autobiography (1853)?
- How was Northup psychologically affected through his narrative?

These questions would lead to the information of the following research hypotheses:

- Freedom, racism and revenge are very likely to represent the themes tackled in Solomon's autobiography

- Solomon Northup's psyche is assumed to be affected inferiorly, by sensing otherness and revenge.

Therefore, this research work conducts an analytical approach in attempt to reach a deeper insight on his personal journey as a slave. It encompasses two interrelated chapters. The first chapter uncovers a historical background of African-American literature then; it deals with one of the main genres of literature called "slave narratives". The third section of this chapter elaborates on the contribution of Solomon Northup's autobiography during the Antebellum Period; one of the crucial "slave narratives" in the African-American literature.

Furthermore, the second chapter provides a thematic and psychologist analysis on Solomon Northup's autobiography, depicting his struggles, and agony. It demonstrates the meaning of slavery from the lens of a twelve years enslaved man, which permits a deeper scrutiny inside the mind of a slave.

Chapter One:

Reflections on Slave Narratives

Introduction

The topic of this thesis is “A Psycho-thematic Reading of Solomon Northup’s *Twelve Years a Slave* (1853)”. In the current chapter, three sections will be tackled. Starting with an overview of the African American literature during, shedding the light on the antebellum period and dealing with the main historical facts which are needed to fully understand the literature.

The second section briefly introduces the readers to the slave narratives; through presenting an explanation of the concept and what importance do slave narratives portray for the African American literature. They play the role of a reminder of the horrific period of slavery and social injustice faced by the African-Americans.

The slave narratives do not prove the existence and worthy of each human being only, but they take into account their journey into survival, faith and hope towards freedom and social justice. To elaborate, autobiographies and memoirs written by former slaves play a significant part in the African-American literature.

Hence, the third section highlights an interesting and remarkably outstanding slave narrative written by Solomon Northup. His autobiography entitled “*Twelve Years a Slave*” highly contributes to the significance of African-American literature, which reflects his experience into slavery during twelve years. Solomon’s narrative also revolves around the reality of slavery, racism and brutality of both African men and women during the antebellum period.

I. African-American Literature

African-American literature has become an inevitable part of American literature and culture. As a body of literature, African-American literature represents a variety of written pieces produced by African descent writers who live in the United States. It provides the historical background and the main achievements of black writers from the colonial period till the present. It also replicates the voices of the people who have mostly faced racial discrimination and sought social justice and freedom.

A myriad of social and historical events pushed many African-Americans to be poets, writers and artists to express and share their journey. They used writing to establish a place for themselves in that community. Therefore, it is essential to shed the light on the main problems that Africans faced in the US in order to comprehend the roots and history of African American literature.

Historically, The English contributed to the issue of segregation of race, segregation and tensions of color. The English adventurers and traders who visited the African Continent have created unfavorable images and preconceptions of blackness and physical differences between the two peoples which developed the concept of inferiority and distinction (Bruce 02). Their prejudices depicted inferior descriptions of Africans in the literature read at that time, they were portrayed as ruthless and cruel and even described as ugly people.

Early in the 18th century, Africans in the US, especially in the South, had no right for testimony in court, nor the freedom to possess a property. In some places like Virginia, some African-Americans lost their right to vote and were described as 'Colored', 'Negros', 'Black' and 'African American' (Warren 5).

Most of them were not educated and could not write or read; yet that did not stop them from enriching the African-American literature. In fact, African-American literature embodies a variety of works from novels, poems, autobiographies and plays revealing the status of race as a whole. The pieces they produced mainly reflected their identities (Warren 5).

The variety of African-American writing is pertaining to different literary periods from the colonial period till the present: the colonial period (1746-1800), the antebellum period (1800-1865), the reconstruction period (1865-1800), the protest movement (1960-1969) and the contemporary period (1970-present).

During the 19th century of the history of America, the antebellum period was considered as the most critical and sensitive period. It represented the years after the War of 1812 (1812-1815) and the precedent period to the Civil War (1861-1865). The period marked its impact on the American society through exhibiting African-Americans' crucial issues back then. It was marked by the rise of abolition and the gradual polarization of the country between abolitionists and supporters of slavery.

During the Antebellum Period, a myriad of African-Americans regarded narration and literature as a means for the abolition of slavery, for instance: Frederick Douglass, Harriet Jacobs, and Solomon Northup. Their agony and sufferings produced the African-American genre of literature that treated different situations in the country; the prevalent topics reflect slavery, racism and segregation (Jones 37). Furthermore, it encompasses their "poems and slaves" narratives that revealed the cruelty of slavery. A considerable number of abolitionist newspapers allowed slaves to share their stories, for instance the Harriet Jacob's "Incident in the Life of a Slave Girl" was edited by William Lloyd Garrison editor of "*The Liberator*" and "*Lydia Maria Child*" (Jones 37).

Throughout that period, many slaves were labeled as “recalcitrant”; in which they had countless attempts to revolt or escape the torment. Although, they had brilliant leaders like Gabriel Prosser and Nat Turner in Virginia, most of their revolts and efforts turned into failure and their leaders were eventually condemned to death (p,38). In this aspect, Harriet Jacobs states:

Those who never witnessed such scenes can hardly believe what I know was inflicted at this time on innocent men, women and children against whom there was not the slightest ground for suspicion-colored people and slaves who lived in remote parts of the town suffered in an especial manner. In some cases the searchers scattered powder and shot among their clothes, and then sent other parties to find them, and bring them forward as proof that they were plotting insurrection. (82)

A further illustration, along with black men narrations, the antebellum period permitted feminist writers’ interference opposing slavery. They protested against their long struggles with racist oppression and gender-based violence through narratives, poetry, speeches, and essays; including Harriet Jacobs' *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*. They fought for gender equality and racism in writings, the fact that “They were to be seen and not heard” (Wheelock 78) triggered African women continued to fight through literature even after that period. Women like Maria W. Stewart and Mary prince (Wheelock 78).

It is the period that portrayed slaves struggle to achieve freedom through both oral and written tradition in African-American literature (Smith and Jones 39). They are equally significant, in which the transition from oral to written literature is emphasized through slave narratives in the African-American culture (Irele 26). Moreover, the profound impact of the Antebellum Period on the American society, history and literature; eventually led to the westward expansion to the Pacific, a population shift from farms to industrial centers, sectional divisions that ended in civil war, the abolition of slavery and the growth of feminist movements.

Thus, much of African-American Literature during the antebellum period was an emphasis of the humanity of the blacks' protest against the cruelty, ignorance and enslavement of pre-Civil War South, these narratives attempted at restoring the individual

dignity of the blacks. It reached early high points with slave narratives of the nineteenth century.

II. Slave Narratives

African-American literature is deeply rooted in historical circumstances of slavery. The majority of African-American Literature writers started their literary works via some form of the slave narrative, whether they were born in slavery or not.

Slave narratives represent a crucial part of the African-American literary tradition. Either expressed orally or written by the slaves themselves, a slave narrative is a genre of African-American literature that developed in the middle of the 19th century by the fugitive slaves accounting what they lived in the South and which were mostly written after taking their freedom. They concern what have experienced and lived under slavery and even after or during their fugitive period; depicting all the different paths they took, from injustice and brutality, the persistent inhumanity towards the slaves, to redemption and freedom.

Although the majority of blacks during slavery had no right to read or write, the slave narratives appeared with their autobiographies between the year of 1760 and the end of the Civil War. After the year of 1865, many of the former slaves devoted their lives to writing their stories and publishing their work when slavery was finally abolished.¹ Frederick Douglass, as one of the most famous writers to demonstrate slavery's educational limitations, believed there was power in learning how to read. In his words; "The more I read, the more I was led to abhor and detest my enslavers." (Douglass 278).

The slave narrative of the 20th century assisted the Black Americans to deal with their lives with the words of their former slaves. It was useful to the doubtful blacks to define their

¹ Slave narrative. Encyclopedia Britannica Online. Retrieved 12 April, 2020, from <http://www.britannica.com/art/slave-narrative>

identities based on the narratives of their ancestors. The Black females were illustrated as unfavorable in the early literature: “Black people often presented them as fat and doting mammies or as seductive temptresses and jezebels, seducing and conquering with sex.” (Smith 55)

Although, slavery was an institution in the south which imposed a place in the world of literature, there was a variation and different narrative forms existing between the narratives of freed slaves and what free blacks who had been born in the North of America. Free blacks in the North often revolted against slavery and racial injustices through the spiritual narratives: ‘The spiritual addressed many of the same themes of slave narratives, but has been largely ignored in current scholarly conversation’ (Peterson 4).

According to Vincent Caretta, Ukawsaw Gronniosaw (also known as James Albert) is regarded as the initiator of the slave narratives. In 1772 he published his “Narrative” autobiography in London, which sheds the light on loosing and regaining freedom (Caretta 57). However, some other historians consider Equiano as the originator of the slave narrative because of his firsthand literary testimony against the slave trade. His “Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano; or, Gustavus Vassa, the African. Written by Himself” was the first to become the best-seller narrative. It was the first narrative to tackle slave ships and trades and portrays different styles as slavery narrative, travel narrative, and spiritual narrative, which was first published in 1789.²

Prior to diving into other important narratives and African-Americans authors, it is relevant to mention Harriet Beecher Stowe and her “*Uncle Tom’s Cabin*”, published in 1852. This is not a slave narrative but rather an anti-slavery novel. She abolished slavery through

² . Encyclopædia Britannica Online. Retrieved 12 April, 2020, from
Slave narrative <http://www.britannica.com/art/slave-narrative>

highlighting the injustice of slavery and the harsh reality of slavery in an artistic way that inspired many to join the anti-slavery movement and greatly influenced other slave narratives written. The book constructed a new perspective on the relationships between the slaves and their slaveholders. (Stowe 173)

A further illustration, Harriet Jacobs and her groundbreaking work entitled “*Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*”, published in 1858. From a former slave, Jacobs ultimately managed to be free herself and become an abolitionist and writer. She explored the male and female dichotomy and exposed the horrors of slavery. This narrative, the first of its kind, demonstrates the triumph of an enslaved woman over society chains, injustice, racism and slavery during the 19th century America. It depicted her resistance to her master’s sexual exploitation and her ultimate achievement of freedom for herself and her two children.³

Although most slave narratives depicted women as helpless and victims who were silenced by threaten or male abuse, her work provides audiences with a fresh perspective on the slave narratives. In her preface, she states that the purpose of this work was to arose women of the North to realize the cruelty and the awful situation of women in the South (Jacobs 5).

She revealed “Incidents” of both psychological and physical agony and at the same time liberation explaining that “Only by experience can anyone realize how deep, and dark and foul is that pit of abominations.” (Jacobs 7). This quote revealed the fact that what a slave woman experienced from cruelties and abuses of her master, threatening and taking away her children, struggling to get them back and seeking liberation.

³ . Encyclopædia Britannica Online. Retrieved 12 April, 2020, from
Slave narrative <http://www.britannica.com/art/slave-narrative>

The slave's attainment of reaching liberty did not happen by merely reaching the free states in the North, but rather they ought to appoint themselves a new name, dedication to the abolishment of slavery and complete devotion to the anti-slavery activism in the United States. Accordingly, one of the most famous former slave writers who had the same perspective as any other African-American writer and supported the previous claims is Frederick Douglass. He demonstrated the dilemmas they faced in his "Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave, Written by Himself", written in 1845. He later wrote another autobiography called "My Bondage and My Freedom" in 1855; a sequel to revise and expand his life struggles for liberty and freedom against Northern racism.⁴

Most importantly, the narrative did not reveal his journey during slavery only, yet it accounted his dedication to the abolitionist movement. When he became known to the public due to the book he published; his popularity compelled him to move to Britain in order not to catch him and return to slavery. For that reason, this "(...) is not simply a particularly forceful example of the slave narrative genre but also a reminder that African American literature has often been produced at considerable risk to its authors." (Ernest 91).

All the previously mentioned works became bestsellers and were reprinted several times. One reason for the immense interest in the slave narrative was "(...) that the AfroAmerican bondsman, (was) denied a "voice" in print by the de jure and de facto prohibition of literary training (...)" (Davis 36). Each character they presented is tied to the South as revealed through a reflective narrative position that is a "retrospective flight into the past—to address the painful losses sustained in the passage to freedom" (Wong 17). Yet, the narratives intrigued many

⁴ . Encyclopædia Britannica Online. Retrieved 13 April, 2020, from
Slave narrative <http://www.britannica.com/art/slave-narrative>

people in the North due to the fact that they simply did not know the actual implications of being held as a slave.

Hence, there are other authors whose autobiographies greatly contributed to the African American literary tradition: William Wells Brown and the “Fugitive Slave”, Elizabeth Keckley with “Behind the Scenes; or, Thirty Years a Slave and Four Years in the White

Slave narrative <http://www.britannica.com/art/slave-narrative>

House”, Solomon Northup’s narrative, *Twelve Years a Slave* (1853), Octavia Butler’s *Kindred* (1979), and “Up from Slavery” by Booker T. Washington, which was a best seller during the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century. (Washington 1-5).

III. Solomon Northup

Solomon Northup was born a free African-American in what is now known as Minerva; eastern New York, U.S. Although, it was stated in his “*Twelve Years a Slave*” to have been born in July 1808, he confirmed later on that he was born a year earlier in July, 1807. Unfortunately, his father was enslaved since his birth, and obtained his freedom only after the death of his master. After his liberty, Mintus managed to possess a farm and enough land in order to achieve his voting rights.⁵

Solomon spent his childhood laboring on his father’s farm and acquired how to write and read. In his twenties, he married Anne Hampton. They moved to Saratoga Springs, New York after selling their farm in 1834. After settling there, they had to take unusual jobs for the sake of taking care of their three kids. Apart from being a farmer and a laborer, Solomon was known as a talented musician who played fiddle remarkably. (Fiske 101)

After gaining a fine reputation, in late March 1841, he was approached by two men from a nearby county who attempted to “inveigle” him. They were aware of Saratoga’s busy seasonal business during springs and that most of African-Americans there were in need of income and seeking jobs to support their families. They faked their identities claiming to be circus

⁵ Solomon Northup. Encyclopædia Britannica Online. Retrieved 15 April, 2020, from <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Solomon-Northup>

performers and lured him with a certain budget to join their act as a fiddler, heading to New York. (Fiske 101)

He accepted their offer and accompanied with them. The moment they arrived to Washington, D.C., in early April, he was drugged and lost consciousness. Solomon woke up finding himself chained and enslaved. He attempted to defend his independence stating that he is a kidnapped free man, however beatings silenced his claims to freedom. Thus, he began his extended period as a slave, related in detail in his autobiography, *Twelve Years a Slave*.

(Fiske 102)

He was carried to Richmond, Virginia, and then transported by a ship to New Orleans. The moment he arrived, he was offered for sale at a slave market where they altered his name to become Platt Hamilton. Where most slaves were struggling to create an identity, Northup must be brutally trained to deny his own (Worley 247). He was compelled to spend 12 years as a slave in the Bayou Boeuf plantations of central Louisiana's red river valley (Fiske 103)

His first owner was called William Prince Ford, who is claimed to be kind. However, due to financial crisis he was compelled to sell him as a repayment of debt to the cruel John M. Tibaut in 1842. Although, Northup was Tibaut's only slave, he tried to whip Northup during a fight, but his resistance triggered his master to execute him. Northup was rescued by Ford's overseer. Eventually, he managed to escape another assault from Tibaut and sought protection from Ford, who asked Tibaut to sell or release him. (Fiske 103)

Northup was purchased by Edwin Epps, in April 1843. Where he was used for multiple purposes, from an artisan slave to a field hand and sometimes worked as a driver responsible for other slaves. He failed many escaping attempts, yet he never lost hope. Eventually, he

managed to forward letters to his friends in New York only by the arrival of a Canadian abolitionist; a carpenter named Samuel Bass, who visited to Epps' farm. When receiving his letter, Henry B. Northup, an old friend of his, rushed to Louisiana to save him. Northup was legally freed on January, 1853.⁶

The story of his release was widely known. Following his rescue, years later, Solomon Northup's reunion with his family in New York was hindered by a stopover in Washington, D.C., where he brought charges James H. Birch; the slave trader who deceived him and sent him to Louisiana years earlier. However, due to his African origins, he was not allowed to legally testify in court, and his efforts failed after two other slave dealers testified on behalf of Birch. (Fiske 103)

At various times, stories were published plotting that Northup had colluded with his kidnapers, in attempt to benefit from the proceeds of his own sale. Northup strongly denied allegations of collusion. Unfortunately, he was not the only kidnap victim to be accused of claiming to sell himself. It was also said of Eli Terry, and to a lesser extent, George Armstrong. (Fiske 103)

Northup published his autobiography "*Twelve Years a Slave*" with the assistance of a local writer David Wilson, which sold 30,000 copies. With the income he earned, he managed to purchase an estate in upstate New York and spent the rest of his life united with his family. He became widely known and popular and participated in extensive speaking tours. A year after, following the publication of his book "*Twelve Years a Slave*", one of the readers of his book declared that he could identify the guys who kidnapped Northup. Although, an indictment was provided, criminal proceedings were carried out, and the case reached the Supreme Court,

⁶ Solomon Northup. Encyclopædia Britannica Online. Retrieved 15 April, 2020, from <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Solomon-Northup>

the kidnapers were never convicted and the case against them was dismissed in May, 1857.

(Fiske 104)

Following these incidents, the public stopped hearing from Solomon, and it was claimed that he joined the Underground Railroad and spent many years in New England in an attempt of rescuing slaves and provide them a safe road to reach Canada. The circumstances; time and place of his death remain obscure. (Fisk 104)

Conclusion

The history taught the whole world how to learn to appreciate and respect others equally, regardless of their race, skin color, or nationality. The battle that African-Americans passed through revealed their strength to survive and defeat slavery, their voices and narratives were the only weapon they had. The fears they had turned into power, to inspire millions of other people suffering from social injustice. Ultimately, they wrote their accounts on the lives in slavery, of the tortures they went through under the hands of their brutal masters, their resistance and escape for the sake of freedom and their fight for the abolition of slavery.

A sample of that contribution reflected Solomon Northup's autobiography "*Twelve Years a Slave*". Northup's case is therefore an example of how all African-American people were considered in the US regardless of status, wealth or claims to freedom. It is crucial to remember that Northup's story stands out from other slave narratives and is very unique in comparison to the others presented above. Solomon Northup's journey is a matter of kidnapping of a free man who eventually regains his freedom, whereas others like both Jacobs and Douglass were born into it.

Chapter Two:

A Psycho-Thematic Analysis of *Twelve Years a Slave*

Introduction

The act of slavery is an abusive process against the human bodies and minds of the enslaved person. Slavery affects not only the physical part of slaves but also deeply manipulates their psychology and tweaks their emotional side. In Solomon's experience, trauma, violence and racism are the most apparent elements that moulded his psyche from a free man to a strong slave. Respectively, the author, in the first two chapters, introduced his ethnic background and his family's history then focused mainly on his years of slavery. This long process divided his psychology into three situations that will be discussed and analysed in the following lines.

Conducting a thematic, sociologist and psychologist analysis on Solomon Northup's autobiography, allows the reader to grasp the meaning of slavery, discrimination and to get inside the mind of a enslaved person. In the Oxford Dictionary, psychology is defined as follows, "the scientific study of the mind and how it influences behavior"

I. Summary of The Autobiography

Born in July 1808 in Minerva, New York, Solomon Northup was a man of different crafts, he worked as a farmer and grew on listening music to become a violinist and mainly he had a family. In 1841, Solomon was lured and abducted then transported to the south to be live a life of slavery for twelve continuous years. In this section, parts of the autobiography are presented briefly.

I.1 Childhood

Solomon is a son of a former slave who gained his freedom when his master died therefore Solomon and his brother grew in a free family. He learned farming from his father then focused on music and reading books. Additionally, in 1829, Solomon married Anne Hampton and had three children from her, Elizabeth, Margret and Alonzo. Northup followed the footsteps of his father by establishing his own farm in Kingsbury; Anne could also provide for the family because of her excellent cooking skills.⁷

In March 1841, while Northup was looking for a different job, he met two men who claimed they can offer him a decent job at a circus where he would play as a violinist. They convinced him to travel with them to Washington D.C from where he would be held captive, beaten then sold into slavery in Louisiana.⁸

I.2 A life of Slavery while in captivity, Northup was pushed into doing tasks that he hated and while doing so he would narrate to his peers his true story and the way he lived before being enslaved. This did him nothing but getting whipped over and over again. He met Eliza, who reminded him of his wife, who had her child taken away from her then sold in an auction in New Orleans. later on, in 1843, Northup was sold to Edwin Epps, a fiercely brutal slave owner who made him live under barbaric conditions. There he met a female slave called Patsey who worked day and night and never disobeyed any order. She was repeatedly abused by Epps who hated his wife. Patsey is an example of the ordeals many women had to endure during the era of slavery.⁹

⁷ Biography. 2015. *Solomon Northup*. [online] Available at: <<https://www.biography.com/writer/solomonnorthup>> [Accessed 11 March 2020].

⁸ Ibid

⁹ Ibid

I.3 Emancipation

In 1853, Samuel Bass, a Canadian carpenter and anti-slavery man, visited the farm where Northup was held captive; Northup explained his situation which made Bass contact his friends to verify the documents that proved Northup to be a freeman, and he succeeded in gaining him his freedom with the help of Lawyer Henry. In the same year Northup took it upon himself to narrate his story, and after months of writing, he published it under the title "*Twelve Years a Slave*": A prominent work of autobiography that sold bestseller and helped in making the voice of enslaved people heard all around America.

II. Thematic Readings

II.1 Trauma

In his book, Peter A, Levine defines trauma as instances or flash backs of overwhelming experiences stemming mainly from sufferance and being part of the human mind, body and psyche. In this way, the sufferer's past remains stored in his mind and do not exhibit any forms of change only to cause a variety of fears and phobias that cloud one's view of the world around. (26)¹⁰ Moreover, During the 19th century, experts in the field of psychology and sociology experts have observed a strange change in the behaviour of people who experienced horrendous events such as the two great wars, Vietnam war or the Holocaust. These events marked the beginning of several mental illnesses caused from witnessing horrific inhuman incidents. Nowadays, the field of psychology is more interested in extracting the element of trauma from

¹⁰ Levine, Peter A. *Trauma and Memory: Brain and Body in a Search for the Living Past : a Practical Guide for Understanding and Working with Traumatic Memory.* , 2015.

literature. Cathy Caruth and Judith Herman were the first to consider taking this approach to study trauma injected in literature.

In *Twelve Years a Slave*, Solomon Northup experienced a sudden change in his life that cause him to adopt a strange behaviour and even consider taking lives of others. This incident was one he was first tricked into playing as a violinist only to be kidnapped and enslaved in the south; Solomon remained in a state of denial and did not believe what befell him and kept telling people around him that he is a freeman. Then, his mind came to accept the truth that he became a slave and should look for a way out of this. While planning so, he met other characters who experienced even horrific traumatic experiences. All these plights added to the sufferance and grieve Solomon had to endure.

Opening his eyes to find himself chained in a dark room, Solomon Northup was abducted from his hometown Saratoga to be taken to New York then sold as a slave in Washington D.C in 1841. He described this situation as being the sudden transition from being a free black man in the northern side of America then becoming a shackled slave in south. He described this situation, " Could it be possible that I was thousands of miles from home.... that I had been chained and beaten without mercy.... that I was even herded with a drove of slaves, a slave myself?" (1)

Similar to this, Solomon describes the process of dehumanizing slaves and how they were objectified or treated as if they were animals. This traumatic scene triggered a suicidal thinking in Solomon's mind and now he is between two choices; remaining a slave and endure the agonizing pain of slavery or take his own life and be free.

Would make us hold up our heads, walk briskly back and forth, while customers would feel our hands and arms and bodies ,turn us about, ask us what we could do ,make us open our mouths and show our teeth, precisely as a jockey examines a horse which he is about to barter for a purchase (2)

I thought I must die beneath the lashes of the accursed brute. Even now, the flesh crowns open my bones, as I recall the scene, I was all on fire .my suffering I can compare to nothing else than the burning agonies of hell (45).

The new aspect of studying the story of Solomon is that he was a free man then his life changed suddenly to the life of a slave man. Therefore, psychologists attempt to analyse how Solomon's mind act to this sudden change specially that it causes him a major trauma that would later direct Solomon's actions.

II.2 Dehumanization

Slave Masters along with white people living in the northern side treated Solomon as an animal who was captured from a forest then put in a cage far from its own hometown. Cruel treatment and daily punishment left scars on Solomon's body and it surely twisted his psychology. In this vein, he says, "I felt there was no trust or mercy in unfeeling man; and commending man myself to the oppressed, bowed my head upon my fettered hands, and wept most bitterly" (39)

Solomon narrated his story of how he was sold to different slave masters and worked in different domains mainly plantation. Each time Solomon stood for himself and tried to explain that he is a free man, James Burch would brutally whip him. Also, every time Solomon says his name to reflect his identity, Burch returns with, "your name is Platt, you answer my description" This act of stripping slaves from their true names would enhance the feeling of trauma in their minds and render them helpless and more obedient. (41)

As the story unfolds, Solomon mentions the story of the young mother Eliza who was sold away from her two children then died without ever seeing them again. Similarly, another story of dehumanization would be the story of another character called Patsy: An industrious

plantation slave who was repeatedly abused by her master. She is described as follows, "naturally she was a joyous creature, a laughing ...yet Pasty wept of tenner , and suffered more than any companions...but because it had fallen to her lot to be slave of a licentious master and a jealous mistress"(Northup 188-189). Overall, Patsy and Solomon's stories in *Twelve Years a Slave* were the prominent stories that reflected the true meaning of being a slave.

II.3 Violence and Oppression

From the standpoint of a black person who experienced both freedom and slavery, the story of Solomon Northup is one of the most authentic autobiographies in the domain of slave narrative. Solomon's description of physical and psychological pain is extremely thorough. He endured most horrible ordeals a human being can go through; on many occasions he was stripped off and nailed to the ground to feel every blow of cold wind on his skin. First thing Solomon experienced after being abducted was getting beaten as an animal, "... Burch commenced beating me. Blow after blow was inflicted on my naked body" (44)

Another instance of oppression is the instance of Burch to deprive Solomon not only from his dignity and pride but also from his identity. He whipped him continuously and asked if Solomon still insists that he is a free man which made Burch grow even angrier and keep on beating Solomon with more energy than before.

Slave masters did not only attempt to enslave Solomon but also to make strip him of his humanity. When Solomon was sold to Mr. Epps, the latter forced him to whip a peer slave "Patsey" who did nothing wrong but paying her friend a visit. Solomon whipped her to the point where her blood dropped on the ground.

Dehumanization, violence and oppression were the physical torments Solomon had to endure, these crucial elements would later constitute or modify the mindset of Solomon. For example, such events built what is called in psychology "a traumatic memory" in this way, a

bridge between physical pain and psychological pain is constructed. That is to say, physical pain, which is temporary, gives birth to an everlasting psychological illness: trauma and phobia that would play a crucial role in determining Solomon's behaviour. This takes us to the second part of this chapter in which the researcher will focus on the psychological aspect of *Twelve Years a Slave*.

III. Psychological Aspects

Indeed, *Twelve Years a Slave* is considered one of the most prominent novels in the history of African American literature. It tells a story of a man whose life changed over night: from being a free man to becoming enslaved for a whole decade. Despite all the years of harsh treatment and servitude, Solomon managed to keep his mind and spirit intact thus preserved his humanity and sanity. Psychologically, Solomon proved that even if the body is punished and enslaved, the mind could still be free and face horrendous fears. In the section below, two psychological aspects will be examined: otherness and revenge.

III.1 Otherness

In *Twelve Years a Slave*, the element of otherness constitute a large portion of Solomon's narrative. It occurs in many instances as human trafficking, oppression and forcefulness. In other terms, otherness in this novel is every other character that is not Solomon: other black people, those who sold and bought slaves and certainly white people who mistreated Solomon. One aspect of brutality, otherness did not spare children from slavery and basically enslaved everyone who was black. In this, he confirms, "there I found three slaves –one of them a lad of ten years, the other young men of about twenty and twenty-five" (48).

Others, in this case slave masters, forced Solomon to remain silent about his true identity of being a free man because it would only get him into more troubles and cause him more whipping. Hungry and sleep-deprived, in another passage Solomon narrates the sleepless nights

he had to work during because he was not given more choices than work or get the whip! “there I still stood in the noon-tide sun, groaning with pain. for long before daylight I had not eaten a morsel. I was growing faint from pain, and thirst and hunger” (120). All the whipping and oppression Solomon suffered planted few ideas of revenge in his mind. He realized that one day he will gain his freedom back and will pay the other for what they did to him.

III.2 Revenge

Revenge, being a sort of psychological illness, is considered as a delayed reward and a feeling of justice. It is defined in Oxford Dictionary as follow, “the action of inflicting hurt or harm on someone for an injury or wrong suffered at their hands; the desire to inflict retribution.” Vengeful people are thought to be hurt in their past but they could not forget the pain resulted from that incident, this gradually leads to a noticeable change in behavior and makes that person believes that s/he will only gain peace of mind when vengeance occurs.

Solomon developed a dark idea of avenging himself from those who mistreated him and turned him into a slave after he was a free man. Through his writings, Solomon was never aware of the gap that existed between black and white community in America until he was abducted and taken to the south to work in plantation. There are many reasons that triggers revenge in a person's mind, among which is the feeling of being oppressed and deprived from basic human needs. In this passage, Solomon describes the conflicting ideas of good and evil that swarmed in his mind, “There was “a lurking devil ”in my heart that prompted me to kill the human bloodhound on the spot to retain the gripe on his accursed throat till the breath of life was gone! I dared not murder him, and I dared not let him live” (135).

This statement occurred when Solomon almost killed -or thought of killing Tibeats who used a hatchet to assault Solomon in the absence of Mr. Ford. Solomon, however, could control himself and did not commit a major sin that would take him from the feeling of revenge to the

agonizing feeling of regret. Furthermore, a similar scene took place before the end of Solomon's story, when he went back to James H Burch with the idea of taking his life in a lawful manner.

Yet, all of his attempts were in vain which made him made him perishes the idea of revenge and return to his family to lead his life in a peaceful way once again.

III.3 Freedom

Naturally, nothing could replace the feeling of being free and a man does not crave anything more than what was his then taken from him. Northup worked his way up to freedom first by telling a laborer that he is willing to write a letter, unfortunately that laborer told Mr. Epps; however, Northup learned to remain discrete about his plans. Second, meeting the Canadian abolitionist was the first step towards gaining freedom. Solomon describes the way he was prudent as follows, "the great necessity of strict silence and secrecy" (269-271)

The few lines above reflect how eager Solomon was to become a free man again, yet this did not made him rush in taking any reckless decisions, because he knew his very life depends on it and he will not be the only one who gets the whip. Occasionally, he felt some despair and allowed some dark thought like, "you will not gain your freedom or see your family again" entre his mind; However, the day he delivered letters to the Canadian carpenter, he felt hope again.

Third, the Canadian abolitionist reached out to a lawyer called Henry. B who would make sure to check Solomon's legal papers to check whether or not he was a free man. Few months later, Solomon was taken back to New York and stood in the supreme court to gain him his deepest desire: freedom.

After Northup gained his freedom and restored his identity, his narrative changed from being a story of plight and hardship to become a story of encouragement and hope. Arguably,

Twelve Years a Slave is considered as one of the few autobiographies that described the mental and physical torments a slave faces in swinging between freedom and slavery. Solomon ends his book with, "... I hope henceforward to lead an upright though lowly life, and rest at last in the church yard where my father sleeps" (321)

Conclusion

Eventually, Solomon's Northup story did not only shed light on the true face of slavery and the crimes that white men committed, it also showed us how can physical pain turn into an emotional one causing a great trauma in the mind of the sufferer. *Twelve Years a Slave* is a revolutionary slave narrative that told in detail what it means to abruptly lose one's free state to become a slave in a short notice. Additionally, the author contributed also in presenting to the readers that sufferance, be it mental or physical, it cannot stand in the face of true determination and willingness to becoming a better human being.

This chapter has given a brief account of Solomon's background then it moved to discussing the elements of trauma and dehumanization that he had to endure. Then, it shed light on the results of physical pain: otherness and revenge and ended with describing how the main character went through difficult ordeals only to reach what he craved the most during his journey: freedom.

General Conclusion

In the history of America, slavery held a significant part in both the economic and social life during the 18th century, from which the African-American literature was generated. It was a movement that marked its beginning through the appearance of one of the most significant genres: “Slave Narratives”.

During the 18th and 19th centuries, slave narrative appeared as a means of defense and defy against social discrimination and slavery. It was their response to the injustice and damage, and their voice to freedom after a long suffering. Many former slaves, including Harris Jacobs and Fredrick Douglas wrote slave narratives about their personal lives.

Beside those writers many African-American slave women had their share in literature as they wrote about their experiences in a form of biographies, poems and essays. A further illustration, Harriet Jacobs who was known for being the first African-American woman writer, and Phillis Wheatley who was sold into slavery at an early age and used poetry as a form of protest.

One of the outstanding stories that defied slavery and marked its presence in the Afro-American literature is Solomon Northup’s autobiography. His “Twelve Years a Slave” which was considered as one of the most prominent novels in the history of African-American literature. The story depicted an autobiography of a free born man who woke up one night to find himself kidnapped and sold into slavery for twelve years. Although his journey was full of dishearten, agony, and both psychological and physical brutality, he managed to find his freedom and reunite with his family again.

Furthermore, in his novel, Solomon described all the kinds of treatments and sufferings he went through, yet he managed to preserve his mind and spirit. Thematically, he portrayed the

trauma, dehumanization, violence and oppression and all kinds of malicious deeds that slaves had to encounter. Although his psyche was trapped between otherness, revenge, and freedom, Solomon, through determination and willingness, revealed that enslavement of the body is temporary as long as the mind and soul's freedom is permanent.

Solomon's and former slave narratives reflected a prominent part of African-American literature, culture and society, which marked the dark history of the U.S. Their stories proved the sufferings, the cruelty and struggles they were compelled to experience. Ultimately, their past and journeys played a major role for the awakening of the democracy of the U.S. The movement maintained the fact that African-Americans deserved equal rights as whites.

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