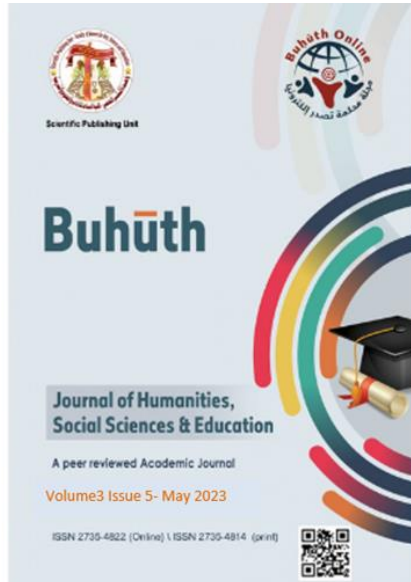




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## The Journey of Self Discovery in Cheryl Strayed's Memoir *Wild* (2012) and its Film Adaptation

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### Abstract

The personal development of women is greatly influenced by the experiences they face from their early ages. Those women who are exposed to domestic violence in their childhood are more vulnerable to suffer from psychological disorder in their adulthood. These psychological problems are intensified if these women are exposed to another trauma along their lives. Shedding light on the suffering of women victims of psychological traumas and their way of recovery has been the main focus of myriad literary works which later on grab the attention of film industry. Therefore, this study aims to question Jean Marc Vallée's cinematic adaptation (Wild 2014) of the memoir *Wild: from Lost to Found in the Pacific Trail* (2012) by Cheryl Strayed; it concentrates on studying the differences and similarities between two different media: memoir and film, through adopting Linda Hutcheon's adaptation theory to embark upon a post-feminist approach clarified by both Angela McRobbie and Rosalind Gill. Moreover, this study explores the verbal and visual representations of the attempts of a woman writer in healing herself from serious psychological disorders. Through examining the theory of trauma and recovery by Judith Herman, this paper studies the efforts of a post-feminist protagonist in achieving recovery and her journey of self-discovery after being inflicted by repetitive traumatic incidents.

**Keywords:** Film adaptation, feminist memoir, self-discovery

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The personal development of women is greatly influenced by the experiences they face from their early ages. Those women who are exposed to domestic violence in their childhood are more vulnerable to suffer from psychological disorder in their adulthood. These psychological problems are intensified if these women are exposed to another trauma along their lives. Shedding light on the suffering of women victims of psychological traumas and their way of recovery has been the main focus of myriad literary works which later on grab the attention of film industry. Therefore, this study aims to question Jean Marc Vallée's cinematic adaptation (Wild 2014) of the memoir *Wild: from Lost to Found in the Pacific Trail* (2012) by Cheryl Strayed; it concentrates on studying the differences and similarities between two different media: memoir and film, through adopting Linda Hutcheon's adaptation theory to embark upon a post-feminist approach clarified by both Angela McRobbie and Rosalind Gill. Moreover, this study explores the verbal and visual representations of the attempts of a woman writer in healing herself from serious psychological disorders. Through examining the theory of trauma and recovery by Judith Herman, this paper studies the efforts of a post-feminist protagonist in achieving recovery and her journey of self-discovery after being inflicted by repetitive traumatic incidents.

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## 1. Introduction

Both the memoir, *Wild: from Lost to Found in the PCT* (2012), written by the American author, Cheryl Strayed, and its adapted film *Wild* (2014) directed by the filmmaker, Jean-Marc Vallée, revolve around the post-feminist, Cheryl Strayed and her experience in 1995 as a solo hiker of the Pacific Crest Trail extending 1,100 miles starting from the deserts of Mojave in California ending at the Bridge of Gods at the border of Oregon and Washington. Along her journey, given the boundless time through hiking, Strayed is able to contemplate on all her past life shifting from her childhood memories till remembering her trespass against herself and her beloved ones ending by achieving her physiological recovery. Both the memoir and the movie expose the depressive traumatic condition which Strayed has suffered from after the death of her mother which gradually leads to weaken the relationship between her siblings and their stepfather, then her separation from her husband. Both mediums focus on how walking and hiking have helped her in her arduous trek as a recovery plan to heal from her deep grief after using heroin and being involved in several sexual relationships.

## 2. Objective of the Study

This study explores a feminist memoir *Wild: from Lost to Found on the Pacific Crest Trail* (2012) and its film adaptation *Wild* (2014) written by a female author, Cheryl Strayed. It depicts the dilemmas of the female protagonist, Cheryl Strayed, internalized in the psychological traumas provoked by both patriarchal and cultural ideologies. Moreover, Strayed strives to voice her thoughts and feelings while focusing on her resisting pursuits to reveal her self-governing experiences. Through analyzing both genres, memoir and film adaptation, this study examines the driving motives that urge the female protagonist to go on a hiking journey seeking her self-recovery. Furthermore, it scrutinizes how the process of adapting this memoir into movie screen does not only contribute in delivering the same messages of defending women's individuality in respect to the different techniques suiting each medium but also greatly affects the commercial success of both the printed memoir and the movie.

## 3. Memoir as a Genre of Writing

Memoirs are short stories about the life narratives of their authors that focus on and reflect the relationship between the writer and his/her surrounding. In defining the meaning of a memoir, Thomas Couser, Professor of American literature and life writing, explains that it is “a nonfictional record or re-

presentation of actual humans' experience" which "depicts the lives of real, unimagined individuals" (15). They are written specifically for the sake of representing the writer's self. The subjectivity of the memoirs has stemmed from the fact that they revolve around a significant event in the writer's life that taught him or her a lesson that should appeal to the reader to continue reading (24). Consequently, Couser emphasizes that "memoirists do not invent the worlds of their narratives" (170); their subject matters already exist in their real life, their aim is to skillfully present them to their audiences. That is why, memoirs are written in the first-person narration using figurative language that evokes the emotions of the readers. As for the characters in the memoirs, they are real characters whose existence in the events is to complete the author's own story, "Memoirists thus have much less freedom in the creation of characters than novelists" (171). Concerning the themes of the memoirs, they are developed from real-life experiences; authors are "interested in how an event shapes personality and identity: what choices a real person makes, what influences he or she detects in the formation of his or her character" (172). Thus, themes vary between developing an identity, changing life, overcoming an issue, incurring a loss, or resisting discrimination. For a beneficial reading of the memoir's story, it is recommended to identify the writer's intention in writing his/her memoir. The forms of memoirs vary between confessing, boasting, defending, witnessing, or accusing (Couser 177-1). For the sake of understanding a memoir, one has to know their purpose. Since they do not offer imaginative worlds as created in fiction, their subject matter has to introduce what appeals to the reader without losing its authenticity.

#### 4. Trauma Theory

Some women who have suffered from traumatic experiences in their past resort to writing memoirs either to vent out their pain or to enable other women to learn from their experiences. Women who have painfully endured child abuse or domestic violence grow up with the feeling of deprivation and isolation which develop later on into psychological disorder. Accordingly, the childhood of a woman plays a vital role in shaping her personality. The American psychiatrist, Judith Herman, states that "the conflict between the will to deny horrible events and the will to proclaim them aloud is the central dialectic of psychological trauma" (1). David Spiegel states that "the essence of traumatic stress is helplessness—a loss of control over one's body. The mental imprint of such frightening experiences sometimes takes the form of loss of control over parts of one's mind—identity, memory, and consciousness" (23).

Therefore, the traumatic event influences a woman's psyche, as in most cases she has to suffer its consequences for a long time. Thus, trauma results in "a disorder of the perception of time, of the body, and of the self" (Scaer 71). In accordance with this, Herman asserts that "the story of the traumatic event surfaces not as a verbal narrative but as a symptom" (1). Therefore, to distinguish between the types of traumas, many psychologists argue that they are classified as Post-traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), Complex-Post traumatic Stress Disorder (c-PTSD), Dissociative Disorder (DD) and Borderline Personality Disorder (BPD).

In her book, Herman clarifies each type by explaining its symptoms and its impact on the psychological well-being of the victim. Additionally, she offers her way of recovery from these traumatic disorders. Moreover, those victims who endure repeated traumatic events experience severe symptoms known as complex Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (c-PTSD) as delineated in Herman's declaration "Complex PTSD is resulted from prolonged and repeated traumas, especially those originating in childhood" (257). She elucidates that being exposed to physical or sexual exploitation, witnessing domestic violence or suffering neglect in childhood renders the child to experience "long-term health consequences" (257). After conducting in-depth researches, Herman denotes that "survivors of childhood abuse display significantly more insomnia, sexual dysfunction, dissociation, anger, suicidality, self-mutilation, drug addiction, and alcoholism than other patients" (88). Thus, those who suffer from chronic traumatic stress struggle to live a normal life.

Individuals, including women, in specific, who have experienced abuse in their childhood have been reported to show psychological signs of borderline personality disorder (BPD). Both Laura Smith and Charles Elliot have specified four factors that are responsible for the development of BPD including "problematic parenting", "abuse and trauma", "early separation and loss" and "disorganized and disrupted families" (62). In defining what is a Borderline Personality Disorder, Kim Gratz and Alexander Chapman point out that it is "a long-standing pattern of relating to the world that does not work well and causes problems and distress for people;" it further involves "instability in many areas of life including emotions, relationships, behavior and identity" (27). Therefore, it is a mental illness that has a damaging influence to how a person perceives him/herself and concurrently, to how he/ she is able to have a healthy relationship with the surrounding world.

Therefore, the path of recovery is a strenuous one that demands long time of patience and hard work along its stages. During the journey of recovery, the

traumatized person has to know that it is a process that necessitates gradual healing. Considering that “trauma robs the victim of a sense of power and control, the guiding principle of recovery is to restore power and control to the survivor” (Herman 112). The victimized woman needs to learn how to control her emotions, thoughts and behavior using healthy and effective methods that suit her vulnerable self at the same time assist in empowering her. Consequently, the victimized woman is able to re-create a respected self-image of her own away from the old distorted one by shame and guilt. She is capable of forgiving herself, respecting her humanity with its weakness and strength.

## 5. Post-Feminist Theory

Addressing the basis for the traumatization of women in literature through exploring the documentation of those women to their dilemmas and their ways in facing them is the central aim of most feminist literary criticism. With the passing of time, the post-feminist era has revealed other forms of responsibilities for women, but this time they are towards themselves. Therefore, the approach of post-feminist theory is to assist women in developing their power by regaining their inner strength to be able to rebel against all forms of patriarchal subjugation. Thus, post-feminism is another kind of empowerment for women in the post-feminist era to reinforce and secure their individualism. This provokes Angela McRobbie, Professor of cultural and feminist studies, to stress the association of post-feminism to feminism under the umbrella of ‘double entanglement’, which means that post-feminists celebrate neo-conservative values that appreciate both sexuality and family structure believing that part of human development relies on traditional marriage (McRobbie 12). Furthermore, the glorification of liberalization “in regard to choice and diversity in domestic, sexual and kinship relations” draws the outlines of post-feminists’ calls (12). In the post-feminist world, women are encouraged to welcome their roles as housewives. Besides, it helps them to build their careers without the need to give up their personal ambitions.

Rosalind Gill, the British sociologist and feminist cultural theorist, delineates the characteristics of post-feminism to be in close relation to the ideas of “neoliberalism” and “individualism” that are highly propagated in media culture through TV programs, films, and advertisements (148). In explaining what neoliberalism means, Gill states that it is “constructing individuals as entrepreneurial actors who are rational, calculating and self-regulating. The individual must bear full responsibility for their life biography, no matter how severe the constraints upon their actions” (163). To put it simply, neoliberalism, with its calls for individual empowerment and free choice, agrees with the

ideologies of post-feminism which encourages women to seek what they want believing in their strength and abilities as independent subjects who are capable of taking the right decisions in their lives without the censorship of anyone except themselves. For this reason, McRobbie posits that counting on the accomplishments of feminism varying between receiving education and earning their living, a woman is empowered to become an individual female whose capabilities qualify her to “plan a life of ones own” (17-8). Additionally, the demand for individualism fosters post-feminist women to maintain self-discipline by providing a great care for their inner selves (Gill 1). Accordingly, post-feminism affirms that the self is something that a woman should work on to come up with the best version of herself; it needs constant psychological monitoring and evaluation through a woman's control of her mind and body to achieve self-realization. In the post-feminist era, the self is seen as a “project” that necessitates work, monitoring and discipline to be improved (Gill 156).

Advocating McRobbie's assertion that “the media has become the key site for defining codes of sexual conduct. It casts judgment and establishes the rules of play” (15). Therefore, numerous writers, especially women, accept their works to be seen on the media screen; they trust the profound impact of media on a broad spectrum. Subsequently, the following sections establish the reciprocal relation between both literature and media as different artistic languages of expression that communicate meanings.

## 6. Adaptation Theory

The new technological way of narration represented in visual performances has paved the way for many debates concerning which is better: the traditional way of reading a story or the modernized one of viewing it. Accordingly, with the spread of converting written texts into visual performances, the study of film adaptation has evolved as a way of exploring the relation between the two mediums. As stated by the scholar of adaptation studies, Guillaume Simonet, the word adaptation means “the transformation of a work into a new form” (2). Thus, adaptation is used when any change needs to take place to fit another situation. In media industry, the word adaptation as the process of “transposing of a literary work onto celluliod” (Sadlier 247). Hence, several film makers prefer to adapt renowned literary works to recreate a work of art that satisfies their purposes.

Thus, adaptation theory in its well-known definition is exploring the transforming of any literary genre from one medium to another, whether it is from a novel, play, short story or poem to film, stage play or performed song. It

deals with the extent to which the original literary genre allies with the adapted source. It concerns itself with studying the similarities and differences between the two mediums to produce a creative work of art. Many critics have agreed that whether the introduced genre is a written text or a visual art, it has to be appealing to both the reader and the audience. Thus, any modification is required and accepted as long as it achieves the needed allure. Therefore, any one selecting any work of art for adaptation should be completely aware of the artistic elements that contribute to the success of the process of adaptation as to avoid replicating the original text. Linda Hutcheon, Professor of English and Comparative Literature, comments on this selection by emphasizing that "adaptation is a form of repetition without replication" (xvi). By repetition, the film maker has the task of representing the same story bearing in mind the artistic endeavor of introducing something diverse in the film, "With adaptations, we seem to desire the repetition as much as the change" (Hutcheon 9). Therefore, in her sincere pursuit of analyzing the process of adaptation, Hutcheon proposes several questions varying between "what, who, why, how, when, and where of adaptation" and answers them in her attempt to scrutinize the process of adaptation (xiv).

When studying film adaptation and its relationship to literature, it is essential to come across the audience. The spectaculars of a movie are classified into two categories; they are either the 'knowing' spectaculars who are well acquainted with the movie by previously reading its novel or the 'unknowing' ones whose first encounter with the movie when they see it (Hutcheon 120-1). That is why the rule of the adapter is not to mimic the source text, on the contrary, he is now the innovator of his own work and "his source is only a pretext, which provides catalysts, scenes which use his own preoccupations to produce a radically new work" (Wollen 113). The filmmaker's creativity develops from his extensive exploration for the text besides his sincere intention in visualizing an adaptation that carries his own signature.

### 6.1. Kinds of Adaptation

As far as exploring an adapted film is concerned, besides stating that the fruitful endeavor in investigating it is to identify the kind of relation that links the source book to the adapted film, three categories have been established in delineating this interconnection. Both John Desmond and Peter Hawkes in their book, *Adaptation: Studying Film and Literature*, offer three classifications in specifying what sort of influence has the former on the latter. For them, there is a 'close adaptation' which means that the adapted film closely maintains the narrative elements of plot, setting, themes, and characters to original text. "A



film is a close adaptation when most of the story elements in the literary text are kept in the film and few elements are dropped or added” (Desmond and Hawkes 3). The second one is the ‘intermediate adaptation’ which substitutes some of the written text’s features by those of the film techniques whether by expanding or reducing the plot and the character’s roles to create a full-fledged film. The last classification is called a ‘loose adaptation’ which keeps the soul of the primer text, yet it has its own reading which urges a great sort of modifications to the adaptation “A film is a loose adaptation when most story elements are dropped and the literary text is used as a point of departure” (Desmond and Hawkes 3). Consequently, a produced adaptation is a reflection of various causes including the ideological viewpoint of the adapter, the types of audiences whether knowing or unknowing, the form to which the adapted text is transformed to, and finally, the context of representing and receiving the movie.

## 6.2. The Adaptation of Cheryl Strayed’s Memoir

Considering that this study is based on studying a memoir and its film adaptation, it is crucial to specify what are the techniques that are employed to convert a written memoir into a movie screenplay. Reese Collins clarifies that “when writing a movie memoir, it is crucial that a screenwriter capture the original author’s story, as well as the author’s voice. Memoirs are distinctive just as individual people are” (n.p.). Accordingly, the themes of any memoir explore individual experiences that are “ extreme, tense, endearing, and tragic” (Collins n.p.). Thus, for a successful adaption of a memoir, the director has the task of having a thorough understanding of the whole text; knowing every single detail about the circumstances that surround writing the memoir enables that director to introduce a film that follows the main text.

In respect of giving a comprehensive analysis of the correlation between the memoir and its adapted film, this study sets up its base on answering Hutcheon’s six questions: what, who, why, how, where and when through analyzing Cheryl Strayed’ memoir *Wild: from Lost to Found on the Pacific Crest Trail* (2012) and its adapted film under the same title *Wild* (2014). The main concern of this study is to pinpoint the differences and similarities which have evolved during the process of converting a verbal medium to a visual and audible one which in its turn demonstrate the director’s talent to embody his interpretation of Strayed’s memoir through utilizing different means of expression presented in film.

It is worth noting that through working on the written text, the director, Jean-Marc Vallée has adapted almost all of Strayed’s memoir that describe the

main incidents which have led her to be traumatized, yet he has overlooked what did not help her in her journey of recovery. For this reason, "a close adaptation" is Vallée's best choice when working on dramatizing Strayed's memoir to illuminate her endeavors in attaining her purpose of hiking. This closeness has taken place through reducing and expanding in the story's plot and the roles of the characters to create an integrated performed version of the written text.

Both the memoir, *Wild: from Lost to Found in the PCT* (2012) and its adapted film *Wild* (2014) revolve around the post-feminist, Cheryl Strayed, and her experience in 1995 as a solo hiker of the Pacific Crest Trail extending 1,100 miles starting from the deserts of Mojave in California ending at the Bridge of Gods at the border of Oregon and Washington. Along her journey, given the boundless time through hiking, Strayed is able to contemplate on all her past life shifting from her childhood memories till remembering her trespass against herself and her beloved ones ending by achieving her physiological recovery. It is relevant to point out that the factors contributing to Strayed's trauma align with the findings of Smith and Elliot, who have identified four main factors that can lead to the development of Borderline Personality Disorder including "problematic parenting", "abuse and trauma", "early separation and loss" and "disorganized and disrupted families" (62). Therefore, both the memoir and the movie depict Strayed's previous traumatic experiences, including domestic violence during her childhood and the death of her mother, which gradually lead to the deterioration of her siblings' relationship with their stepfather and eventually to her separation from her husband due to depression. Both mediums focus on how walking and hiking have helped her in her arduous trek as a recovery plan to heal from her deep grief after using heroin and being involved in several sexual relationships.

Ruining her marriage with her infidelity after the death of her mother, especially after discovering her anonymous pregnancy, Strayed has shamefully decided to have an abortion then to go on hiking for around three months to regain the woman whom her mother wanted her to be. Her endeavor affirms Herman's assertion, "the first principle of recovery is the empowerment of the survivor. She must be the author and arbiter of her own recovery" (94). Being included among women travel writings because of its tone that challenges the patriarchal hegemony of a woman who crosses the world searching for her lost-self highlights the revolutionary spirit in Strayed's memoir that is greatly welcomed in the post-feminist era. Writing her memoir does not only depict a particular phase in Strayed's life which signifies a turning point for her from a

complete devastation to a gradual healing, it also revives the memory of her dead mother whom she truly loves and appreciates. This is why Couser asserts, memoirs can “immortalize— or at least memorialize—actual people like “a partner, parent, child, or friend” which is believed to be “an act of real generosity” (4).

In her memoir, Strayed has thoroughly elucidated her reasons that have incited her to start her hiking. According to Herman, “remembering and telling the truth about terrible events are prerequisites both for the restoration of the social order and for the healing of individual victims”(1). Therefore, Strayed's memoir is a tangible proof that she has overcome her trauma after the death of her mother by being able to recall and face most previous events through her writing. Her endeavor has confirmed Gill's philosophy that a post-feminist woman must accept a full responsibility towards herself to be the only controller of her own life, making her own decisions and bearing its consequences (163). Being raised believing in the same concept, the devastated, Strayed has felt it is her own obligation to find a way to save her “self” as she documents in her memoir, “when my life became unmoored by sorrow, the thing that would make me believe that hiking the Pacific Crest Trail was my way back to the person I used to be” (*Wild* 17). In the movie, she articulates, “I was good...I ruined my marriage and now I am ruining the rest of my life...I have to change”. In both genres, despite her grief and suffering, Strayed has been depicted as a brave woman whose self-determined personality has empowered her to realize that she has to choose how to rescue herself. Her journey for self-healing reinforces Gill's claim that the woman's own self has “become a project to be evaluated, advised, disciplined and improved or brought into recover” (156).

Strayed's exceptional memoir has inspired many film makers to pay attention to its insightful story to be seen on a movie screen to wider audience. The idea of turning the book into a movie was promoted by the actress (Reese Witherspoon), who has played the role of the protagonist and contributed to the production of the film (Translated by the researcher) (Gaber and Elaskary 416). After two years of its publishing, the director Jean-Marc Vallée has worked on its cinematic adaptation with the script writer, Nick Hornby, to be released in 2014 starring by the famous actress, Reese Witherspoon. Therefore, the following sections examine how the visual performance of Vallée embodies Strayed's memoir through answering Hutcheon's six questions.

## 7.What?

In her sincere pursuit of analyzing the process of adaptation, Hutcheon begins her inquiry by asking “what exactly gets adapted? And how?” (9). At the beginning, she notes that what can be “transferred and transmuted” are the ideas, “content”, yet how this content is going to be “expressed” is task of the film director. For this reason, both the author of the memoir, Strayed, and the director of the adapted film, Vallée, are responsible for presenting a true version of human experience to their audience through their mediums. Therefore, in 2014, the screen adaptation of *Wild* by Vallée has provided the answer for Hutcheon's “Wh” question as it offers the audiences an explanation of the relationship between herself and the world around her which in its turn conveys the message of writing the memoir.

### 7.1.Performed Scenes

Hutcheon affirms that every word that is converted into performed action is believed to be an adaptation (39). Strayed's preparation for the hiking journey is one of the performed scenes that the director successfully adapted to his audience for the sake of conveying Strayed's insistence on going through this journey of recovery. The enormous size of Strayed's backpack is considered as one of the challenges that embodies her anguish which she suffers from all along her journey. In her memoir, she describes the overweight of her pack to be “enormous and compact” (42). For this reason, Strayed has decided to call it ‘monster’. From her perspective as she notes, “I was amazed that what I needed to survive could be carried on my back. And, most surprising of all, that I could carry it. That I could bear the unbearable” (92). From Strayed's figurative words, the reader understands that the immense size of Strayed's pack does not only symbolizes the material stuff that she might need during her hiking for three months, but also is a metaphor for Strayed's emotional burden that she has to bear on her back. In the movie, it is Greg, one of the hikers, who identifies it as monster when introducing Strayed and her backpack to his friends once noticing her entering the gate of Kennedy Meadows. Monster becomes physically lighter by the things she sees and the people she meets along the trail who have helped her to lighten her burden in other ways.

In her memoir, Strayed talked about some of the people whom she has met during her hiking who have assisted her to continue her journey. Some of them cross the PCT like her and others are people whom she asks for help to get her somewhere with their cars on their way. Owing to the limitation that is imposed on the film structure as clarified by Hutcheon who affirms, “time and

timing clearly present a real challenge for the adapter to a different medium” (65), the directors is obliged to make skillful choices that inevitably reduce the “interpretive richness of the written text “(70). For this reason, the movie has selected some main characters to be embodied on the screen to focus, mostly, on their kindness and assistance to her. Their embodiment has emphasized Herman’s declaration that part of a personal recovery is based upon creating “new connections” (94). For the sake of encouraging women to do what they feel is needed to take care of themselves whether by seeking recovery from a trauma or finding a true meaning for their lives, Vallée has presented the character of Stacy. She adopts a post-feminist ideology which urges her, like any other women who choose to hike the PCT by their own, to search for herself on her own journey.

In the post-feminist era, women believe that they have a prime duty to develop a better version of themselves as affirmed by Gill’s words above. What both Strayed and Stacy have in common is their sense of emptiness; one after the death of her mother and the other after being divorced for three times. Vallée’s movie publicly celebrates the triumph of a post-feminist woman who does not only rebel against her inner fears, but also revolts, like most women in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, against “being hemmed in by society’s barriers” (Russell 14).

Along working on the memoir, Vallée has not only skilled in performing most of Strayed’s written words, but also has modified some of the incidents she has mentioned in her book to be visually seen.

## 7.2.Modified Scenes

According to Hutcheon’s words, any applied modification is to serve the film’s main theme” (40). One of the prominent scenes where Strayed declares overcoming her pain is modified on the screen to announce the success of her endeavor of the whole hiking journey which in its turn marks her psychological recovery. The director has skillfully ended his movie by interweaving Strayed’s words after meeting with Jonathan and her last lines of the book in one long performed scene marking Strayed’s healing transformation and recognition to her pain and suffering. After listening to the young kid’s song that reminds her of her mother’s love, the scene shifts to depict her in her tent burning the last part in the PCT guide book with her own voiceover, quoting from the book and admitting, “what if I forgive myself? What if I was sorry? But if I could go back in time, I wouldn’t do a single thing differently. What if I wanted to sleep with every single one of those men? What if heroin taught me something? What if all those that got me here?”. The movie has added other lines summarizing her appreciation to what she has passed through as she articulates, “It took me years

to be the woman my mother raised. It took me four years, seven months and three days to do it...I found my way out of the woods. And I did not even know where I was going until I got there on the last day of my hike”.

Although Strayed's memoir originally has been ended with her announcement of acceptance and letting go of her pain, the director has chosen to modify the last scene to have Strayed confirm her successful pursuit of hiking through a voiceover, in which she shares how she has continued her life after completing the hiking journey. Presenting the success of Strayed in achieving recovery affirms Herman's words that even that path of “recovery is possible...that the path is long and sometimes arduous” (267). Despite involving a modification to the ending of the movie, Vallée could not betray Strayed by not cherishing her heroic endeavour as he has closed it in the same way the book is ended.

The film adaptation of any written text obligates the film makers to transgress some of the details that are included in the book. The coming section explains through adopting Hutcheon's theory what are these deleted parts and why they have been overlooked.

### 7.3. Deleted Scenes

The transformation of any written text necessitates crossing out some details to fit the new medium. For this reason, the cutting process in the memoir is essential to make it “fit the screen in terms of time and space” owing to the fact that it needs more time to perform an act than to read it (Hutcheon 37). Hence, although they are part of Strayed's family, the director has overlooked the roles of both Eddie, Strayed's step-father and her sister, Karen. Despite dedicating a considerable part of her memoir talking about both, the movie has not come across them. In the book, Strayed has talked about how she was close to Eddie whose kindness had replaced her father's cruelty. She notes, “he chased us and caught us and held us upside down...we would run after him, shrieking with a particular joy that had been denied us all of our lives because we'd never been loved right by a man” (*Wild* 152). Moreover, in the memoir, Karen is introduced as Strayed's elder sister. In the movie, there is no mention to her role in Strayed's life.

### 7.4. Added Scenes

According to Hutcheon's analysis, adding “more bodies, voices, sound, music, props, costumes, architecture, and so on” are necessary for the sake of the adaptation of any written works (37). The director adds several scenes where Strayed attempts to use writing as her way of reflecting her deep thoughts and inner feelings along her journey of changing her life and achieving self-

growth. In many scenes, the audience is able to read her mind as she is usually seen picking her notebook and writing in it to express her fear and regret. In one of these added scenes, while having some rest in her tent, she documents her first reflection, "I thought of you today. I felt a burst of energy". The audience does not know whom she is talking about. Yet, later on, the audience will understand that her mother is her source of empowerment. Her reflection corresponds Herman's justification that being able to recall and talk about painful past events is one of the steps along the journey of recovery. In order to dramatize Strayed's arduous experience in hiking, the director has added the scene of climbing the rockfall that has impeded her progress in hiking. The camera depicts her careful steps in managing to cross it. The scene is ended by the camera capturing a moment of triumph through smile drawn on her face.

The film as a visual representation is ultimately a domain of symbols and signs which produce the messages that the spectator receives from the film makers relying on how this symbolic language gains its value in the logical context.

### 7.5. Costumes

For the sake of completing the process of converting any medium to the cinematic screen, the adaptation of any written text to the spoken medium "involves the visual dimension, as well as the verbal; with that added dimension come audience expectations not only about voice but...also about appearance, as we move from the imagined and visualized to the directly perceived" (Hutcheon 42). Thus, the use of costumes and make up have united with Strayed's impressive acting to create the wilderness atmosphere of the movie. Throughout the whole movie, Strayed is shown wearing a hiker costumes to enable her to be comfortable in walking and hiking through the twists and turns of the trail or to facilitate for her climbing rocks. Therefore, her outfits vary between plain cotton T-shirts and shorts in light colors in the summer and in the cold weather, she puts on her long pants and long sleeves beneath a waterproof jacket. For the rocky terrain of the trail, Strayed wears her hiking boots and sometimes, she is seen with her hiking sandals. It is worth noting that Strayed has relied on her own inner power as a woman who respects her own individual potentiality more than her beauty. Like Strayed, all the other hikers are portrayed wearing their hiking outfit to ensure hiking more efficiently.

### 7.6. Music

If the characters' outfit represent their age and circumstances, their feelings are articulated through the played music along the movie. For stressing on the importance of music, Hutcheon contends, "music offers aural

'equivalents' for characters' emotions and, in turn, provokes affective responses in the audience" (23). For this purpose, in order for Vallée to reveal Strayed's contextualizing message in her memoir, he has added soft music in the film that corresponds with her traumatization and slow recovery. Throughout the whole movie, the audience notices Strayed's way in distracting herself from the pain she suffers from by singing. She is either seen crooning some lyrics that reflect her psychological state or a music is played in the background mirroring her inner self. In clarifying the employment of music tracks in his film, Vallée states, "I like to keep the characters through music backgrounds and create play lists for them and incorporate this, integrate this into the script before we shoot ("Wild: Official Interview"). Accordingly, songs and music have summarized to the audience all what had happened or could happen to Strayed. She plays them as if reading a tangible statement which is difficult to be superseded.

## 8. Who?

For Hutcheon, the answer to the questions "Who is an adapter?" is closely related to the question "Why do adapters choose to adapt certain works of art?" She concludes that "in a film the director and the screenwriter share the primary task of adaptation" (85). Hence, it is the director and the screenwriter who can be called the highly significant adapters of the written content. In the case of the movie *Wild*, it is directed by the Canadian, Jean-Marc Vallée and its screenplay is written by the English, Nick Nornby. Besides, it is produced by the American, Reese Witherspoon, Bruna Papandrea and Bill Pohlad who are believed to be also influential adapters whose motives are worth examining. Strayed's memoir is a self-reflective narrative that has been adapted into a movie to offer women guidance on how to cope with loss and move beyond the constraints of a patriarchal world. Concurrently, it is an embodiment of traumatized people who need to feel that they can recover from the pain of losing any of their beloved ones.

## 9. Why?

Hutcheon then shifts to study the drives of the adapter that urge him to adapt a written text. She classifies these intentions into four categories varying between the "economic lures", "the legal constraints", "the cultural capital" and "the personal and political motives" of the adapters (86-1). Therefore, the post-feminist theme in Strayed's memoir captures the film makers to introduce the model of a woman who resembles the majority of post-feminist women in their individual perseverance and determination that urge her to defeat her human weakness to be able to lead a life of her own. Claudine Ko points out that the



movie *Wild*, “already wins as the most feminist film of 2014” (n.p.). Realizing that true stories of people, in general, and women, in specific, who have succeeded in challenging themselves, encourages many film producers to represent these stories again to a wider audience as people like to see that ordinary people like them can overcome their life obstacles. Besides, asserting that this adaptation is an adventurous film attract the filmgoers who are in love with this genre. Therefore, attracting all these audiences means guaranteeing more financial gains.

It is worth noting that the cultural capital as declared by Hutcheon is one the reasons that incites adapting any written text. For this purpose, Scott insists, “*Wild* the book is part of a literary tradition that stretches back to Thoreau and Wordsworth, and the movie is part of a more recent trend that includes “*Into the Wild*,” “*127 Hours*” and “*Tracks*” (n.p.). The three production companies: Pacific Standard, River Road Entertainment and TSG Entertainment have collaborated to produce this film to call for a proper recognition for Strayed's memoir. They seek to praise the individual diligence of the female experience in Cheryl Strayed's memoir to display it in a way that inspires the post-feminist women whom they target.

Besides the economic and cultural reasons behind adapting Strayed's memoir, there are also the personal motives of the film makers. To illustrate, the director has announced that he accepted the task of directing the film because his mother had died not long ago of cancer, the same disease that killed Cheryl's mother and sparked the journey (Translated by the researcher) (Gaber and Elaskary 416). In repeating the experience of adapting true life stories of people on a cinematic screen, Vallée sees in adapting Strayed's story an opportunity to embody the social realism that he is keen to depict in many of his works like *Sharp Objects* and *Big Little Lies*.

## 10. How? (Audiences)

Moreover, concerning the question “How can a work of art be adapted?”, Hutcheon reminds her readers that the discrepancy in the expectations of the known and the unknown audiences urges the film producer to cherish the hopes of both audiences with the aim of creating an adaptation that appeals to both tastes. She assures that the audience cares for watching a repetition of a film with a sense of “difference, of familiarity and novelty” (114). Given that *Wild* (2014) is an adapted film indicates that the story has been reread and rewritten for the sake of offering a certain message to the audience. Equally important, by emphasizing that it is a story that revolves around a woman experience, the aim

is to target mostly the female audience while respecting the expectations of both the 'knowing' and 'unknowing' audience.

Although it has been written by a male screenwriter, Nick Hornby, the film's main audience is of mostly post-feminist women as it focuses on the lives of women more than of men while presenting these women with strong and determined characters. Beside the fact that *Wild* (2014) seeks to satisfy the expectations of a female audience, it also seeks to entertain both the knowing and unknowing viewers. As an illustration, the filmmakers have kept the same storyline of the memoir without offering much change in order to win the knowing audience and to satisfy his expectations. Beside the knowing audience, the producers of the movie have to respect the expectations of the unknowing audience. By introducing that his film is based on a real story, Vallée guarantees that his film will attract a group of audience who are interested in viewing true life experiences.

## 10. When?

Moreover, Hutcheon assures that both setting and time influence the context of the adapted work. She explains, "an adaptation, like the work it adapts, is always framed in a context—a time and a place, a society and a culture; it does not exist in a vacuum" (142). Any adapted film is controlled by when and where it is going to be viewed, so an experienced adapter is fully aware that part of the received acceptance of his film depends on the rationality beyond choosing the settings and defining the time. In consequence, the production of *Wild* (2014) in the time context of the twentieth century has influenced in shaping its creation as Hutcheon affirms that timing of releasing any adapted work marks the "difference that is not only individual but also reflects subtle changes" that have occurred to any culture (145). In the sense that the majority of women in that period have learned how to voice their thoughts. Subsequently, this movie targets the post-feminist women who embark on going on a journey of a self-care to retain their individuality. It does not target the American audiences only, but also it aims to be viewed by all women worldwide who need to have a space for themselves where they can have a real opportunity in discovering themselves away from all the constraints that have hindered their development. Ko denotes, "between the frankness of Strayed's sexual encounters and the brutal blood and blisters incurred during her epic hike, the fact that the story hangs on a single female performance focused on a feat of physical and mental strength is remarkable in itself"(n.p.). That is why, Dwight Garner, the American journalist, underlines, "the cumulative welling up I experienced during "*Wild*" was partly a response to that

too infrequent sight: that of a writer finding her voice, and sustaining it, right in front of your eyes" (n.p.).

### 11. Where?

*Wild* (2014) has been produced by the mindset of different nationalities for the Canadian, English, American and the worldwide audiences. It is considered one of the films that have been produced and shaped by the context of "wilderness" where the majority of the scenes are acted outdoors in the deserts and forests along the path from California to Washington. The camera offers various long shots of Strayed when she walks, travels and hikes the Pacific Crest Trail focusing on the details of each destination. John Wylie pinpoints that walking in the woods with its boundless spaces resonates with a day dreaming state of preoccupation and self-reflection which compels the walker to be attentive to his/her "self in solitude" (238). Accordingly, Strayed's decision to escape from her miserable life with its difficulties and monotony is to give herself the opportunity to reconnect with her inner self by re-experiencing the natural primitive environment of a wider landscape through the act of walking which grants her with the opportunity to regain control over her life.

Although the film describes the outer side of the wilderness, it delineates the wilderness of Strayed's inner self with mixed feelings varying between regret, shame, grief and hope to overcome the weakness of herself. Scotts marks, "the structure of "Wild" is as complicated as its themes. The action on the trail walking, thinking, pitching the tent at night and packing it up in the morning is punctuated by looping reminiscences of the life that preceded it" (n.p.). The settings of the film have been changed reflecting Strayed's internalized conflicts. In commenting on the wilderness of his film setting, Vallée marks: Cheryl did not have a nice relationship with nature. At the beginning, it was too hot, too cold, too windy. There were snakes...afraid of caterpillar... As we follow her on the trail close to the end, it changes. It becomes her friend and she becomes one with it. ("Wild: Official Interview")

In conclusion, the success of Strayed's psychological journey to discover herself, which has been a necessity, leads her to a safe harbor in her life that was marred by many impurities. Her past life with its pain and suffering was the driving force that provoked Strayed to go on this hiking journey in the hope of transforming her life. Strayed, the post-feminist woman, refuses to live a life that deprives her of her individuality after facing several traumatic incidents. Accordingly, with a brave spirit, Strayed has left everything behind her to go on a journey of rediscovering herself through identifying her weaknesses to regain

her inner strength as a woman who respects her feminist role. Analyzing Strayed's story from Herman's lens assists examining how Strayed progresses through the recovery stages and how her experiences of trauma affect her thoughts, behaviors, and relationships. In addition, it develops a deeper understanding of Strayed's experiences and motivations, as well as the ways in which how both the text and its adapted film address issues of trauma and recovery. Moreover, through writing her memoir, Strayed is able to reflect on her past which has given her the power to find her purpose in life after learning from her mistakes and being able to recover from her traumas. Strayed's artistic talent has incited the director of the movie to convert her written words into a performed film where he has skillfully included the important scenes which describe the suffering of Strayed with the wilderness inside and outside herself that is urged by the presence of a strong motivation to overcome it in order to attain self-recovery. Vallée's cleverness lies in his competence in deleting and modifying the chosen scenes that serve in introducing her perspective while managing to stick to the movie's time constraints without losing the main thread of the original text. Both Strayed and Vallée have underlined the damaging impact of the traumatic incidents that have inflicted Strayed starting from being abused in her childhood till witnessing the death of her beloved mother in her adulthood. *Wild* seeks to live up to the expectations of young women who are interested in a story about rebellion and hope with happy endings. To sum up, *Wild* adapted film has secured the attention of many women in the 21<sup>st</sup> century whether they knowing and unknowing audience alike by offering them the same message through illuminating that Strayed has reached her psychological recovery through being provided with a proper environment. This memoir and its adapted film have offered both the readers and the audience a hopeful ending for any traumatized woman.

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## رحلة اكتشاف الذات في مذكرات البرية لشيريل سترايد و معالجاتها السينمائية.

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### المستخلص:

يتأثر التطور الشخصي للمرأة بشكل كبير بالتجارب التي تواجهها منذ أعمارها المبكرة. النساء اللواتي يتعرضن للعنف الأسري في طفولتهن أكثر عرضة للمعاناة من الاضطرابات النفسية في مرحلة البلوغ. تتفاقم هذه المشاكل النفسية إذا تعرضت هؤلاء النساء لصدمة أخرى طوال حياتهن. كان تسليط الضوء على معاناة النساء ضحايا الصدمات النفسية وطريقة شفائهن محور التركيز الرئيسي لعدد لا يحصى من الأعمال الأدبية التي استحوذت فيما بعد على اهتمام صناعة السينما. لذلك ، يهدف هذا البحث إلى دراسة الفيلم المعالج سينمائيا (البري ٢٠١٤) للمخرج جان مارك فالي السينمائي لمذكرات (برية: من الضياع إلى النجاة علي درب باسيفيك كريست (٢٠١٠) للكاتبة شيريل سترايد ؛ يركز هذا البحث على دراسة الاختلافات والتشابهات بين وسيلتين مختلفتين: المذكرات والفيلم ، من خلال تبني نظرية تكيف ليندا هوتشيون للشروع في نهج ما بعد النسوية الذي أوضحه كل من أنجيلا ماكروبي وروزاليند جيل. علاوة على ذلك ، تستكشف هذه الدراسة التمثيلات اللفظية والمرئية لمحاولات كاتبة في شفاء نفسها من اضطرابات نفسية خطيرة. من خلال دراسة نظرية الصدمة والتعافي من قبل جوديث هيرمان ، تدرس هذه الورقة جهود بطلة ما بعد النسوية في تحقيق التعافي ورحلتها لاكتشاف الذات بعد تعرضها للحوادث المؤلمة المتكررة.

الكلمات الدالة: معالجة سينمائية، البحث عن الذات، مذكرات نسائية.