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Transmedial Analysis of the Passion Narrative in the Scripture and the Movie *The Passion of the Christ*

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Abstract

*Transmedia storytelling is the art of narrating stories using various media, with each medium adding something distinct to the narrative universe. This narrative universe may be accomplished with any media, including radio, TV, movies, video games, internet video, and web applications. The paper aims to demonstrate how different media platforms may convey one or more events over various channels to create a coherent whole. The article aims to comprehend the intricacies of translating written information into a visual medium using a cinematic approach. This study examines a trans-medial examination of two distinct transmedia storytelling approaches: the conventional methods of conveying the gospels in the Bible and the translation of the Gospels in the Scripture into a film. The two sources that were taken into consideration are the Four Gospels in the Holy Bible, which describes the final hours of Jesus' life on Earth, and Mel Gibson's film adaptation of those Gospels in the Scripture, *The Passion of the Christ*, which shows the events surrounding Christ's conception, life, teachings, healings, temptation, and the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. Gibson opted for the transmedia medium of a movie to raise global awareness of Jesus' sufferings in his last hours on Earth. This essay traces Gibson's creative liberty by comparing his portrayal of *The Passion of the Christ* to the Biblical account of Jesus' suffering in his final hours.*

Keywords: Transmedia, Narration, Adaptation, Perspective, Creative Liberation, Life, Trials and Tribulations, Death and Resurrection.

"For most of human history, it would be taken for granted that a great story would take many different forms, enshrined in stain glass windows or tapestries, told through printed words or sung by bards and poets, or enacted by traveling performers" (qtd.in Klap 6).

The media theorist Henry Jenkins made the term transmedia storytelling famous in an MIT Technology Review article published in 2003. According to Scolari, sometimes, "transmedia storytelling" is used interchangeably with "cross media," "multimodality," "multiplatform," "enhanced storytelling," (qtd.in Klap 7). Transmedia storytelling is the art of narrating stories using various

media, with each medium adding something distinct to the narrative universe. This narrative universe may be accomplished with any media, including radio, TV, movies, video games, internet video, and web applications. This study aims to show how various media platforms may communicate one or more events through various channels to build a cohesive whole. The goal of the article is to comprehend the intricacies involved in translating written information via a cinematic method into the visual medium of a film. The two distinct transmedia narratives are examined transmedially in this article; first, the conventional methods of narrating biblical stories; and second, the cinematic adaptation of the text. These are the two sources that are considered.

The purpose of the gospels is to present to the intended audience a picture of Jesus as a saviour who entered this world to save humanity from its sin. The term passion narrative is used primarily to refer to the accounts given in the canonical gospels of the suffering and death of Jesus. "Although the word passion has become mixed up with romance, its Latin origins refer to suffering and pain; later, Christian theology broadened that to include Christ's love for humankind, which made him willing to suffer and die for us" (Ebert). According to the Holy Bible, some events that may be included in the Passion narrative are Jesus's triumphant entry into Jerusalem, his purification of the Temple, his anointing, the Last Supper, his suffering, his capture, his trials before Pilate and the Sanhedrin, his crucifixion and death, and his burial.

The following source is *The Passion of the Christ*, Mel Gibson's film version of the Scripture. It shows the events surrounding Jesus Christ's conception, life, teachings, healing, temptation, and crucifixion. Gibson raised awareness of Jesus' sufferings during his last hours on Earth using the transmedia platform, the motion picture. On the other hand, the Four Gospels are written by the Four Evangelists and provide varying accounts of the same historical events concerning the birth, life, teachings, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

The word transmedia is not recent; its origin dates back to when Biblical scriptures were written. Many people were illiterate during the olden days when narratives were passed on verbally through sermons, parables, glass paintings, and live performances.

In his thesis "Reincarnations of Transmedia. Interrelated Objects of Contemporary Transmedia Storytelling and the Medieval Catholic Church", Klap says biblical stories can create communities worldwide. So they inspire franchises, and the Holy Book turns into a franchise. For example, the story of Genesis is experienced by the spectator through a rose glass window, the chapter of Deuteronomy through paintings, and Exodus is told through teachings and sermons. The gospel recounts Christ's conception, early life, teachings, healings, and temptations with equal emphasis on the events leading up to his resurrection. Still, the movie's plot focuses more on Jesus's suffering and death than his life. The film was very shallow, with only a few references to the preachings and parables of Jesus. This visual depicts the main Christian event rather than a sermon or homily. The four evangelists narrate the stories found in the sacred texts in the third person, offering different viewpoints on the similar events recorded in the four gospels. The story is told through several gospel narratives.

In the Scripture, the story is told through parables, lessons, and narrative sections, whereas the visual effects in the film take centre stage above the rhetorical device. Gibson enhanced or interpreted the biblical story using visual and audio effects. When Gibson's interpretation of the biblical account of Jesus' sufferings during his final hours is examined, it becomes evident that the lessons and parables are illustrated via dialogue and character development. While the cinematic version uses music and a soundtrack to enhance the biblical tale, the biblical narration does not explicitly mention any musical aspects. Through its use of expressive cinematography, the film masterfully conveys the emotion and tragedy of the story. "Gibson's portrayal is agonizing, brutal, bloody, bone-crunching, clamorous, messy, noisy, offensive to human sensibilities, protracted, but convincingly realistic" (Sacred).

The biblical narration of the events is told from multiple perspectives with non-linear narration of the events happening in the life of Jesus. On the other hand, the events are arranged chronologically for a gripping plot since the movie's narrative structure is intended for cinematic reasons. To effectively make the movie appeal to a broad audience, the events in the four gospels are categorized and placed chronologically. To some extent, Gibson's creative liberty is revealed in the film. For example, the film incorporates fourteen Stations of the Cross, including the extra-biblical figure of Veronica, who wipes Jesus' bloody face with her veil that keeps the image of his face imprinted on it as a gift for her and for Christians to contemplate forever.

The Bible's story provides a clear picture of the historical and cultural background of the time, and transmedia research shows how much of it is mirrored in the film adaptation. Considering the societal norms, historical events and cultural background relevant to the verse, one can trace out that during the biblical times in the Middle East, Jesus was viewed as an opponent to both the Roman Empire and the Jewish community because the Romans considered Jesus as a revolutionary and secondly, he preached a new covenant to the people which was considered as a threat to the Jewish Priest. In historical and cultural aspects taken into consideration, it is clear that the two prisoners crucified with Jesus are only seen carrying the cross beam in the movie, while Jesus is shown pulling the full cross and not the crossbeam. Historical evidence indicates that the condemned transported just the crossbeam to the site of the crucifixion, where the upright would already have been set up to accept crossbeams that could be swapped out. It seems likely that the two offenders who passed away on the same day endured a comparable degree of flogging, as was customary for those who were going to be crucified. However, the movie shows Jesus alone himself being whipped nearly to death. The harshness and depth of Jesus' bodily sufferings are implied to be what Christians find significant by the severity of the flogging and the lack of flogging for the two criminals. The brief mention of Jesus' flogging occurs in the Gospel of John, where it appears that Pilate had Jesus flogged as a kind of punishment to please the Jewish religious leaders rather than in anticipation of his crucifixion. He meant to chastise Jesus before releasing him from custody. This film depicts a clear and authentic view that parallels the historical context of the period.

Pilate asked him, "What is truth?" After he had said this, he went out to the Jews again and told him, "I find no case against him. But you have a custom that I release someone for you at the Passover. Do you want me to release for you the King of the Jews?" They shouted in reply, "Not this man, but Ba.rab'bas!" Now Ba.rab'bas was a bandit. Then Pilate took Jesus and had him flogged. (The Holy Bible, John 18:38)

The movie starts in the Garden of Gethsemane; Gibson used the 'medias res as' technique, opening the epic or other narratives by focusing on the crucial moment or epic moment connected to the related chain of events following it. Jesus, while praying to God, is tempted by Satan. Meanwhile, his disciples James, Peter, and John are asleep. Judas Iscariot receives thirty pieces of silver from the Jewish priests in Jerusalem for sharing the location where Jesus was present, and the Priest sends his guards to capture Jesus.

"*The Making of 'The Passion of the Christ'*", Gibson claims "faithfulness" to his source material. The "faithfulness" that Gibson claims comes from his and the screenwriter's use of the "canonical" gospels to make sure they had not contradicted the authority of those texts." ("Adaptation") The *Passion of the Christ* is a reflection of a contemplative meditation on Christ's Passion, which includes the Five Sorrowful Mysteries and the Stations of the Cross. The film's narrative structure is derived from the Five Sorrowful Mysteries, mentioned in the Gospels. While discussing the language used in the film, Mel Gibson, who attends only the Latin Mass, has used the language of Latin and Aramaic to dramatize his contemplative film. Still, with a concession, he provides English subtitles to reach moviegoers worldwide to pass the message about the sacrifices, death

and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The film slows everything down into these stations to help the viewer understand the breadth of Jesus' love. This justification does appear to provide some light on Gibson and his team's decision to include these Stations in the film. Gibson makes viewers feel engaged and intensely emotional when these situations are shown. For example, in Gibson's depiction of The Fifth Station of the Cross, his follower Simon assists in carrying the cross to Golgotha. The moment when Mary, the mother, hugs her son as he is taken off the cross is the most moving sequence in Gibson's rendition of The Thirteenth Station. The Priest would say at the Stations that he was taken down from the cross by two of His disciples and sited in the arms of His afflicted Mother. She hugged Him and held Him to her chest with an inconceivable amount of affection. This description precisely describes Gibson's rendition of the incident.

Gibson inserts some beautiful non-diegetic music when Mary holds her son. To emphasize the brutality of these symbols, a disturbing close-up of the bleeding crown of thorns and nails is alternatively cut back and forth. The Synoptic Gospels do not mention this dramatic time with Mary. Even though Gibson created a visual representation of Jesus' suffering and death from the Gospels utilizing new technologies and film making techniques, it nevertheless adds to the cohesive message of Jesus' unselfish love and suffering for the world. Transmedia storytelling involves stories across various media, each contributing a unique element to the story universe. The gospel recounts the events of Jesus' death, like how the movie visualizes it, but with some intensity of creative liberation in the film.

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