

## Abstract

The aim of this thesis is to investigate the applicability of cultural economy theory and meme theory in adaptation studies. These theories have experienced increasing attention lately; however, so far no one has attempted to apply these theories in comprehensive analyses.

For adaptation studies to thrive and develop it needs a framework that can explain why adaptations are performed and how they ought to be studied. The field can look back on a century of repeated claims, and has not yet reached a consensus of opinion; thus, recently some scholars have proposed new directions going forward.

In the first section of the thesis, the theoretical background is presented, and Simone Murray's cultural economy theory and Linda Hutcheon's appropriation of meme theory are suggested as two theories that can offer an explanation to why adaptations are made and how they ought to be studied. In the second part, a case study of the film adaptation *The Blind Side* is conducted according to the proposed methodology. The final part of the analysis section discusses three recent theories of how to understand and study the relationship between versions of works that have been adapted, and what the implications are for adaptation studies.

In conclusion, the thesis argues that both cultural economy theory and meme theory prove applicable and offer meaningful explanations for why adaptations are made, based on cultural and economical perspectives on the adaptation industry, and on the evolution of stories in society by means of replication and change. Murray proposes a methodology for the study of adaptations that stakes out a new course for the field. Meme theory is still largely unexplored and to date no methodology has been proposed, but the theory is promising and may be developed into a fruitful methodology, as demonstrated by the case study of *The Blind Side*. In addition, Jørgen Bruhn, John Bryant and Linda Hutcheon provide distinct, but applicable approaches to understanding why a story is sometimes adapted multiple times, and how the versions influence each other, and their points are incorporated into the proposed framework.

This thesis hopes to offer a small contribution to the discourse on a new direction for adaptation studies through its analysis of the applicability of the two recently developed theories.



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# Contents

<b>1 INTRODUCTION .....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>2 TRACING THE SOURCES.....</b>	<b>13</b>
2.1 BACKGROUND .....	13
2.2 THE AUTHOR AS POINT OF ORIGIN .....	14
2.3 TRACING THE SOURCE TEXT(S) .....	15
2.4 MICHAEL OHER’S STORY VERSUS THE STORY OF MICHAEL OHER.....	17
2.5 WHAT IS AN ORIGINAL?.....	19
2.6 THE FILM’S STATUS AS AN ADAPTATION.....	20
2.7 WHERE EXACTLY DID THE STORY BEGIN?.....	21
<b>3 CULTURAL ECONOMY THEORY - METHODOLOGY AND APPLICABILITY .....</b>	<b>23</b>
3.1 THE ADAPTATION PROCESS IN THE CONTEXT OF CULTURAL ECONOMY THEORY .....	23
3.1.1 <i>Background</i> .....	23
3.1.2 <i>From book to film</i> .....	23
3.2 MURRAY’S ADAPTATION CIRCUIT.....	24
3.3 AUTHORS.....	26
3.4 PUBLISHER.....	28
3.5 SCREENWRITERS.....	29
3.6 PRODUCERS AND DISTRIBUTORS .....	33
3.7 CRITERIA OF SUCCESS .....	37
3.7.1 <i>Financial success</i> .....	37
3.7.2 <i>Critical success</i> .....	38
<b>4 MEME THEORY - METHODOLOGY AND APPLICABILITY .....</b>	<b>39</b>
4.1 THE ADAPTATION PROCESS IN THE CONTEXT OF MEME THEORY .....	39
4.1.1 <i>Background</i> .....	39
4.2 ADAPTATION AS MUTATION .....	39
4.2.1 <i>Migration to favorable conditions</i> .....	40
4.2.2 <i>Death or survival in the meme pool</i> .....	41
4.2.3 <i>The reeducation of Michael Oher</i> .....	42
4.2.4 <i>The narrative of post-racial progress</i> .....	44
4.2.5 <i>The ghetto’s tie to the gated community</i> .....	46
4.3 CRITERIA OF SUCCESS .....	50
4.3.1 <i>Critical success</i> .....	50
4.3.2 <i>Financial success</i> .....	57

4.4 CONCLUDING REMARKS .....	57
<b>5 POTENTIAL GAPS IN THE FRAMEWORK .....</b>	<b>59</b>
5.1 BACKGROUND .....	59
5.2 BRUHN’S DIALOGIC PERSPECTIVE .....	60
5.3 BRYANT’S FLUID TEXT ANALYSIS .....	66
5.4 HUTCHEON’S INTENTIONALITY IN ADAPTATION .....	70
5.5 INCORPORATING THE PERSPECTIVES INTO THE NEW FRAMEWORK .....	72
<b>6 CONCLUSION .....</b>	<b>75</b>
<b>WORKS CITED .....</b>	<b>79</b>

# 1 Introduction

This thesis seeks to investigate the applicability of cultural economy theory and meme theory in analyses of adaptations. These two recently proposed theories may contribute to answering the questions of why adaptations are made and how they ought to be studied; thus their applicability is analyzed by conducting a case study of the film adaptation *The Blind Side*. After a century of repeated claims, the field of adaptation studies has become increasingly polarized, and recently several scholars, like Kamilla Elliott, Linda Hutcheon, Simone Murray, Jørgen Bruhn, Anne Gjelsvik and Eirik Frisvold Hanssen, have given a voice to the need to stake out a new direction for the field to progress and thrive. To achieve this, it is essential to take on board new insights into adaptation processes regarding the reasons adaptations are made, which has implications for they ought to be studied. For precisely these reasons, this thesis investigates recent contributions within adaptation theory by Simone Murray and Linda Hutcheon. While their approaches to answering the field's challenges have distinct foci, their theories may potentially complement each other well and prove applicable.

I will investigate whether Murray's cultural economy theory and Hutcheon's meme theory can be fused into an integrated framework that successfully explains why adaptations are made and how they ought to be studied. More specifically, they will form a framework that explains that adaptations are made partly for economic reasons dictated by cultural economy, and partly because of the human need for retelling stories that fit ever-changing cultural and economic contexts. Thus, this thesis is investigating the applicability of Murray's cultural economy theory and Hutcheon's meme theory in a case study analysis of the film adaptation *The Blind Side*, adapted and directed by John Lee Hancock, based on the non-fiction book *The Blind Side: Evolution of a Game* by Michael Lewis.

For reasons of clarity, the theories are analyzed separately in the case study; however, they do overlap a great deal and must be seen as integrated in the new framework here proposed. One overlap is the criteria of success, defined as critical and/or financial success, so to avoid repetition, the criteria have been artificially separated and are analyzed separately. Specifically, the financial success criterion is analyzed in the cultural economy theory

chapter, because the theory is predominantly concerned with the financial aspect of the adaptation industry. Likewise, the critical success criterion is analyzed in the meme theory chapter, because meme theory deals with the aesthetic and narrative aspects of adaptations, which are often the main concerns for critics.

Murray's cultural economy theory and Hutcheon's meme theory were chosen because they represent new perspectives, and not much work has been done to verify their applicability. Murray has developed a methodology based on cultural economy theory, but due to the recent publication date not much work has been done yet to study its applicability. However suggestive this theory is, it places nearly all emphasis on the adaptation industry and the economic mechanisms that rule it, and thereby fails to acknowledge the aesthetic intentions that also rule adaptations; and thus cultural economy theory is best complemented by a theory that takes this into account and explains the cultural and aesthetic mechanisms at work in the adaptation process, which is what meme theory does.

In an attempt to identify new challenges and new directions for adaptations studies, Jørgen Bruhn, Anne Gjelsvik and Eirik Frisvold Hanssen make a thorough inventory of adaptation studies as an academic endeavor and ask: "Why should anyone study products that result from transferring processes between media, either novel-to-film productions or those in a larger adaptation context?" (Bruhn, Gjelsvik, and Hanssen 3). I have repeatedly asked myself that very same question in the process of trying to understand this field of study. I have discovered that attempting to answer this question gives rise to even more questions in what is a very polarized field. Adaptations have been discussed and studied since the early 20th century, but have seemingly resisted sustained incorporation of adaptation theories.

In her essay *Theorizing Adaptations/Adapting Theories*, Kamilla Elliott laments that scholars over the years have consistently neglected to cite former work, leading to much repetition without variation (24). She also observes a tendency to dismiss opposing views instead of debating them, and is critical of the requirement of each new publication "to justify its existence in terms of originality" (Elliott 23-24). The latter tendency has led to scholars claiming to be innovative, usually by challenging fidelity in seemingly new ways, but she notes that "scholars who have read prior work know that fidelity has always been robustly



challenged in adaptation studies” (ibid.). The unfortunate consequence of this innovation race is that “the critique of fidelity has become so commonplace that the critique of this critique is also widely reiterated” (Elliott 23-24).

Elliott’s critical remarks on the field are consistent with my own impression. There is a need to move away from small case studies and look at the bigger picture if adaptation studies is going to develop as a field in its own right. However, studying the latest publications by Jørgen Bruhn, Anne Gjelsvik and Eirik Frisvold Hanssen, Thomas Leitch, Linda Hutcheon and Simone Murray, it is clear that opinions differ widely regarding the way forward for adaptation studies. Maybe the field naturally resists theorizing, or maybe scholars differ too much in their theoretical and analytical preoccupations? Either way, the field would definitely benefit from a less polarized debate and finding some common foundation, on which to build their work. However, I agree completely with Elliott’s view on theorizing the field: “I am not suggesting that adaptation scholars should agree on a single theory or methodology; this would be the death to any field. I do, however, perceive that adaptation studies is an especially divided field whose polarizations have perhaps precluded new theories from developing” (Elliott 23).

Adaptation studies can look back on a century of repeated claims (see the list in *Theorizing Adaptations/Adapting Theories* 26-28) and very little consensus. In light of this, I want to investigate whether it is possible to find a theory, which covers all types of adaptations, that explains why we make adaptations. This question is essential because such a theory would have implications for how we ought to study adaptations. I will discuss this on the basis of the recent works of the aforementioned scholars and I will pay particular attention to the ideas of adaptation as Darwinian evolution, referred to as meme theory, and adaptation theory based on book history, referred to as cultural economy theory.

In her opening chapter in *A Theory of Adaptation*, Linda Hutcheon goes back to basics and talks about storytelling, which can be argued to be the essence of adaptations. She quotes Walter Benjamin’s insight that “storytelling is always the art of repeating stories” (qtd. in Hutcheon 2), and in that sense adaptations have existed for as long as humans have created art. Yet, adaptations are often seen as secondary, derivative or unfaithful to their source text

(if there is one), and especially if the source text is well-known (ibid.). However, she also mentions that “as George Bluestone pointed out early on, when a film becomes a financial or critical success, the question of its faithfulness is given hardly any thought” (Hutcheon 7).

We can infer from this that it has been a common view that adaptations attempt to copy their sources, and that a film’s success depends on its faithfulness, and usually it has been found wanting. In the book *Film Adaptations and Its Discontents*, Thomas Leitch turns this view upside down and claims that “the main reason adaptations rarely achieve anything like fidelity is because they rarely attempt it” and “we are better advised to ask the question, ‘Why does this particular adaptation aim to be faithful?’” (127). This suggests that we do not make adaptations to copy the book (or another source medium), and if we did, it would be a fruitless endeavor, according to Leitch, because “the book will always be better than any adaptation because it is always better at being itself” (16).

If the aim of adaptations is not to replicate the source, then why do we keep making adaptations? Are we just trying to perfect an old story? Do we keep adapting because the story must stay relevant and updated in a changing cultural landscape? I think it is all of the above. Additionally, there is obviously a financial aspect to the adaptation industry. Adapting a famous work has the potential of attracting a large audience and thus profit financially.

This is consistent with Hutcheon’s view that an adaptation’s success cannot be measured by its faithfulness to a source; instead she suggests that an adaptation’s success should be assessed based on the criteria used in biology: “in terms of successful replication and change” (xxvi). She sees a link between cultural adaptations and Darwinian evolution:

I was struck by the . . . obvious analogy to adaptation suggested . . . by Darwin’s theory of evolution, where genetic adaptation is presented as the biological process by which something is fitted to a given environment. To think of narrative adaptation in terms of a story’s fit and its process of mutation or adjustment, through adaptation, to a particular cultural environment is something I find suggestive. Stories also evolve by adaptation and are not immutable over time. Sometimes, like biological adaptation,

cultural adaptation involves migration to favorable conditions: stories travel to different cultures and different media. In short, stories adapt just as they are adapted. (Hutcheon 31)

To me, this goes a long way in explaining why the same stories are adapted over and over again with variation, and it is by far the most interesting analogy to cultural adaptation I have encountered so far. Darwin expert and famous evolutionary biologist Richard Dawkins suggested this parallel in his 1976 monograph *The Selfish Gene*. He names the cultural parallel to genes “memes,” which adapt for survival in the “meme pool” (Hutcheon 32). Hutcheon suggests that although Dawkins was thinking of ideas when he wrote this, stories can function in the same way (ibid.). In this sense, a successful adaptation depends on successful replication and change.

Leitch comments on meme theory as a theory of textual evolution in his essay *What Movies Want*, and highlights some issues raised by meme theory, such as reducing the mind to a vehicle for the parasitical memes and the nagging question of agency (167-170). According to Leitch, the main question raised by Dawkins’ analysis is: “are memes capable of desire and purposive agency, and what relation do they have to the human brains they colonize?” (168). This question has sharply divided commentators, and Leitch admits that “[i]t is no wonder that few commentators on textual adaptation have followed Hutcheon into the thicket of sociobiology, for the disagreements . . . may seem too absolute to resolve without simply taking sides” (170). However, he does wish to “provoke further discussion” on the topic and thus proposes that the solution could be to change “the terms of the debate from an argument about who or what has the capacity for agency to an argument about the nature of agency” (173; 170). In other words, he claims that it is not necessary to divide the world into agents and instruments, subjects and objects, and so on and so forth, but to instead look at a “middle form” where memes and brains depend on each other (Leitch 170). Finally, Leitch concludes:

Adopting a view of agency that is less anthropomorphic, less centered on individual control and ownership, less driven by a categorical distinction between active and passive roles, would have the salutary effect of decentering human agency in a world whose survival depends more and more clearly on a global rather than a merely human

ecology. . . . It would allow scholars in adaptation studies to take account of recent developments in sociobiological adaptation that they have mostly ignored. (173)

I wholeheartedly stand behind this call to adapt meme theory, as it was originally proposed by Dawkins, to better fit adaptation studies, which is what I will attempt to do in the following chapters.

Simone Murray is among the scholars who discuss why adaptations are made, and consequently, how they ought to be studied. As suggested by the title of her book, *The Adaptation Industry: The Cultural Economy of Contemporary Literary Adaptation*, her main focus is on the financial aspect of adaptations, something which meme theory fails to take into account. Like Hutcheon and Elliott, Murray questions the textual emphasis of past research and proposes a new methodology: “adaptation studies urgently needs to divert its intellectual energies from a questionable project of aesthetic evaluation, and instead begin to understand adaptation economically and institutionally” (16).

She is eager to go beyond the comfort zone of textual analysis, and instead create a sociology of adaptation which will enable us “to ask how the mechanisms by which adaptations are produced influence the kinds of adaptations released” (Murray 4). The inspiration for this methodology comes from book history and its study of the circuit of agents involved from the author to the reader, but obviously adjusted to fit the adaptation industry. She adapts this methodology to adaptation studies and demonstrates that adapting literary sources is not an after-thought, but often a strategy in a book’s publishing plan (Murray 13). Murray also emphasizes the importance of marketing in an adaptation’s potential success. An adaptation’s success depends on its audience reception, and thus the marketing “makes” the adaptation.

The main difference between meme theory and cultural economy theory is agency. Meme theory can serve as an abstract model of the evolution of adaptations through constant mutations, i.e. by replication and variation. However, it does not consider who acts and what causes them to act, but at the same time one could argue that it logically follows that the carriers of the memes, i.e. humans, are the agents and not passive vehicles for the parasitical memes. It is also possible to factor economy into meme theory, by suggesting that an

adaptation's success is dependent upon the number of replications with variation over time, which implies that adaptations survive because of financial or critical success. As mentioned above, none of this is explicitly stated in meme theory and some might find it far-fetched, but I do believe that it can be developed into a constructive theory for understanding why adaptations are made.

In contrast to meme theory, cultural economy theory is significantly more explicit in its model of explanation. Even though its main focus is on the economy-driven industry it still takes into account the changes that occur in the adaptation process, by examining the screenwriter function. More importantly, cultural economy theory has implications for further research in adaptation studies, and Murray spells them out:

A piquant question for adaptation studies researchers to ask themselves might thus be not the traditional (and otiose) one of 'how does this screen adaptation differ from its source text?' but rather 'where did this adaptation begin?'. Such habitual self-reflection would challenge default recourse to methodologies of textual analysis. It should act as a spur to researchers to factor into their theorizations the economic, institutional and geopolitical circumstances facilitating the contemporary proliferation of adapted texts. (102)

Significantly, what both theories share is a methodology that goes beyond textual analysis and is more interested in the adaptation as a process and a product in itself, as opposed to a derivative copy of the source. The analogy between cultural adaptation and Darwinian evolution is strongly appealing, as is Dawkins' meme theory. Seen together, the two perspectives contribute convincing explanations of why we make adaptations and their evolution (albeit at a much faster speed than natural selection), despite the lack of consideration of all aspects of the adaptation process.

Unsurprisingly, cultural economy theory performs better than meme theory when it comes to describing the different agents in the process; after all, it was designed with that aim. I do feel, however, that it does take the focus slightly off of the adaptation as a cinematic work of art,

being predominantly concerned with the process of making the adaptation, rather than the product. This is understandable, given its focus on abandoning “the questionable project of aesthetic evaluation,” which has much merit (16). The aesthetic evaluation of film is already a principal discipline in film departments and textual analysis is an important pursuit in English departments. If adaptation studies is going to survive, develop and thrive, it must find its own field of study, but that is not to say that it cannot overlap with other fields.

However, I still think there is something to be said for studying why the adaptation turned out the way it did, without either resorting to evaluation or focusing solely on the adaptation industry. The fidelity debate is not welcome anymore, and rightly so, but as Leitch has suggested, maybe we should instead study why adaptations are not faithful, but at the same time we should not suggest that they aim to be. His suggestion is closely connected to the analysis undertaken in this thesis, since it follows, that if we are going to study why adaptations are not faithful, we must understand why they are made at all. The insight gained from examining this question will in turn have implications for how adaptations ought to be studied. As a step towards attaining more knowledge on this subject, analyzing cultural economy theory and meme theory appear to be a fruitful endeavor to unveil a new direction for adaptation studies.

It is also necessary to emphasize that meme theory discussed here shares its ancestor with the more publicly known concept of ‘Internet memes,’ which Wiggins and Bowers define as “spreadable media that have been remixed or parodied as emergent memes which are then iterated and spread online as memes” (7). Internet memes are regarded as a genre within digital media, and while they still share characteristics with the original meme theory, they also differ on significant points. On this subject, Dawkins has claimed that “the very idea of the meme, has itself mutated and evolved in a new direction. An Internet meme is a hijacking of the original idea. Instead of mutating by random chance, before spreading by a form of Darwinian selection, Internet memes are altered deliberately by human creativity. In the hijacked version, mutations are designed – not random – with the full knowledge of the person doing the mutating” (qtd. in Wiggins and Bowers 6). This latter characteristic is likewise shared by the appropriated meme theory, which is also non-random.

Hutcheon does not propose a methodology based on meme theory and only discusses its applicability briefly in her book. Thus the theory lends itself easily to new developments and this makes it particularly suitable to be fused with other theories to form a more comprehensive framework, which is what this thesis intends to do.

Thus, the theories mentioned above are the objects of inquiry in this thesis. To achieve the thesis' objectives, the empirical data will be examined in a case study to determine to what extent the theories and the connected methodologies are applicable. The theoretical nature of the thesis demands an analytical approach to the empirical data, and the principal method is a discussion of the theories in relation to the data. The results will then be examined to assess the applicability of the suggested framework. It is important to note that the thesis cannot give definitive answers, but rather suggest some topics for further research.

The empirical data used in this thesis consists of texts, in print and online, as well as a film. The texts are divided into three books, namely *The Blind Side: Evolution of a Game* by Michael Lewis; *In a Heartbeat: Sharing the Power of Cheerful Giving* by Leigh Anne and Sean Tuohy with Sally Jenkins; and *I Beat the Odds: From Homelessness, to The Blind Side, and Beyond* by Michael Oher with Don Yaeger. In addition, Michael Lewis published an excerpt of his book in *The New York Times*, entitled *The Ballad of Big Mike*. The last text discussed is the film *The Blind Side* adapted and directed by John Lee Hancock. Moreover, several scholarly articles, which deal explicitly with *The Blind Side*, or with related topics, form an academic foundation for the discussion. Other empirical data includes film reviews by both professional reviewers and amateurs who post online reviews, and several interviews conducted by online film sites and advertising sites, as well as more established newspapers with online versions, like *The New York Times* and the *Los Angeles Times*.

The reason for choosing this particular empirical data is primarily concerned with *The Blind Side's* adaptation history. The fact that several different versions of the work exist, makes it especially interesting to study. Additionally, all versions have been published within the last decade, which ensures that they have been created in the contemporary adaptation industry and with memes that are still current in our cultural context. It also means that some academic work has been done specifically on *The Blind Side*, but not much. Precisely for this reason, I

have chosen to use non-academic data as well, to illuminate aspects of the adaptations that have not been dealt with in academic circles yet.

The thesis presents the theories in a systematic fashion first to enhance the clarity of the ensuing analyses. The second chapter is called *Tracing the Sources* and seeks to trace the original of the film adaptation *The Blind Side*, and explore whether non-fiction accounts can work as source texts. I also investigate whether the author is the point of origin for a story, because the premise in both cultural economy theory and meme theory is that we need to know where the story began to be able to understand why the adaptation became a financial and/or critical success.

In chapter three, titled *Cultural Economy Theory – Methodology and Applicability*, I investigate the applicability of cultural economy theory by analyzing the transferring process from literary sources to film adaptation in the case study of *The Blind Side*. Specifically, I discuss the methodology proposed by Simone Murray and suggest some modifications, and I then apply the modified methodology to *The Blind Side*. In other words, I analyze the adaptation process from the literary sources identified in the previous chapter, to the film adaptation, by investigating each agent's role in the process, and finally, I discuss whether the film adaptation is a success according to cultural economy theory's criteria of success.

The fourth chapter deals with meme theory, and is called *Meme Theory – Methodology and Applicability*. Here I analyze the applicability of meme theory by identifying the different memes that appeared in the source texts and analyze which memes survived the mutational process of the adaptation into a film, and most importantly, why these particular memes survived and not others. I also explore why some memes were omitted and whether or not meme theory can explain why some memes appear to be better suited for survival than others.

The fifth chapter, titled *Potential Gaps in the Framework*, investigates whether cultural economy theory and meme theory sufficiently explain why adaptations are made or whether they need the support of other theories that attempt to theorize the relationship between versions. It is suggested that the proposed framework does not theorize the relationship



between different versions in an adaptation history, and thus I discuss three different perspectives that considers this aspect and I conclude by investigating whether parts or all perspectives may be integrated into the new framework.

Finally, the thesis' findings are summarized in the conclusion, and I also consider the implications of the results.



## 2 Tracing the Sources

### 2.1 Background

The film *The Blind Side* directed by John Lee Hancock was released in theaters nationwide in the United States on November 20, 2009, inviting audiences into the life of the Memphis-based Tuohy family, consisting of wealthy, white Evangelical Christians Leigh Anne and Sean, their daughter Collins and son Sean Junior, as well as their adopted, black son Michael Oher. For many spectators this was probably the first time they saw and heard of the family, but their story had already been told several times; in the form of the book *The Blind Side: Evolution of a Game* by Michael Lewis; the adapted *New York Times Magazine* account *The Ballad of Big Mike* by the same author, and in countless newspaper articles. The implication of several textual precursors is that it is harder to determine where Michael Oher's story began and whether it is based on a textual precursor at all, since it is also based on real-life events. However, according to its opening and end credits *The Blind Side* is an adaptation, just like an infinitely large number of films.

On the basis of cultural economy theory, Simone Murray's proposed new methodology for adaptation studies suggests that to better understand what types of texts are adapted and why, we need to understand the cultural economy in which adaptations are made. To accomplish this it logically follows that we must trace the adaptation's sources back to the original, or the starting point, and then analyze the adaptation process to better understand the product.

Similarly, in meme theory, which suggests that film adaptations (and other types) evolve in much the same way as genes, we must trace the original meme and analyze the adapted memes to determine whether or not the mutations have led to successful replication and change. This parallel between evolutionary biology and cultural theory was first suggested by Richard Dawkins in 1976, but has sparked renewed interest in adaptation scholars such as Robert Stam and Linda Hutcheon after being presented in the film *Adaptation* (2003, dir Spike Jonze), which explores the process of making film adaptations (Hutcheon 31).

However, the search for the original source text of a given adaptation, and in this case *The Blind Side*, gives way to a myriad of questions, such as what is an original, and is the author the point of origin for a story? When the source text is a fictional narrative it is often “granted an axiomatic primacy and authority” (Hutcheon 16), whereas in the cases of texts based on a true story and living persons the written non-fiction account may be challenged and it might not be the only source for the film adaptation.

In this chapter I seek to trace the source text(s) of *The Blind Side* and explore whether non-fiction accounts can work as source texts, and whether the author is the point of origin for a story, because the premise in both cultural economy theory and meme theory is that we need to know where the story began to be able to understand why the adaptation became a financial and/or critical success.

## **2.2 The author as point of origin**

Bestselling author Michael Lewis was the first to record Michael Oher’s story and publish it both in book form and in *The New York Times Magazine*. The rights to his non-fiction account *The Blind Side: Evolution of a Game* was bought by Twentieth Century Fox with the aim of developing a film. It is therefore easy to suppose that he is the point of origin for the adaptation, although he did not participate in the adaptation process. In an interview with *vulture.com* he says:

[The writer and director John Lee Hancock] didn’t have any interest at all in what I thought, except he’s polite, so he pretends to have an interest. He just does his own thing, and I thought that was a really good thing, too. He just saw what he wanted to do and he did it. So it’s fun to see it happen, but it really has very little to do with me. I mean, I sold it. That’s it. I don’t have anything to do with it. (Yuan)

According to Murray, this is the typical role of the author in the adaptation industry (26). They are handed a check for the text and waved off with a “see you at the premiere,” which might seem like simply an act of politeness, but Murray claims that the author’s presence at the opening night of the film adaptation means more than that:

Serving no production-related purpose, the ritual appearance of the author at the adapted film's premiere can only be explained by the authorial imprimatur and creative blessing that the author presence is intended to bestow upon the adapted text. That is to say, Romantic myths of semi-divine and socially autonomous authorial genius are here being invoked by the adaptation industry itself to disguise its own operations. The adaptation industry by such means works insistently to cover its tracks – avidly playing into the cult of the celebrity literary author for its own commercial self-interest, but ever ready to point away from its own interventions. It thus encourages audiences and critics to conceive of adaptation as a process of dematerialized texts arising almost spontaneously from the twin creative visionaries of Author and auteurist Director (cinema studies' own Romanticist construct). (27)

This suggests that the adaptation industry does not hesitate to exploit the cultural status of the literary author while simultaneously excluding them from the adaptation process, because their contribution is not desirable. Michael Lewis raises an important point when saying that to film adapters the best author is a dead author (Yuan). The price of taking advantage of the cultural capital of the author is that films are conceived as dematerialized texts, and indirectly encourages critics and spectators to compare the two, which usually works to a film's disadvantage.

### **2.3 Tracing the source text(s)**

Although Michael Lewis did not contribute in the adaptation process, writer and director John Lee Hancock has admitted to reading the book *The Blind Side: Evolution of a Game*, but more interestingly, he also went to see Leigh Anne Tuohy (who curiously is the protagonist in the film about Michael Oher's life), because he was concerned with portraying her accurately. When asked about Tuohy's involvement in the adaptation process Hancock has said:

. . . obviously once I read the book and started having meetings and I said I've got to meet this person. And Michael Lewis did a great job of capturing her voice in the book and identifying her and he's from New Orleans. He gets the south as well. I'm from

Texas, which is not the south, but a cousin to it. So I've been, like you said, around Leigh Anne Tuohy's (sic) all my life. And knew that a lot of people would look at it as a cartoon character if you didn't get that. So I needed to go down and hear her voice and just see her operate. And I did and she was great. (McWeeney)

Hancock's choice to seek out the real people behind the book suggests that he was very concerned with portraying them, and specifically Leigh Anne, accurately in the film. This strict adherence to accurate portrayals is interesting to note considering that most spectators would not be able to compare Sandra Bullock's performance to the real Leigh Anne, as she was not a public figure at that point. In other words, it was a gesture to the person behind the character and likely a way of gaining trust and legitimacy to fictionalize their lives. In an interview with [hitfix.com](http://hitfix.com) Hancock talked about having Leigh Anne read through the completed script and trusting him and went on: "it is [a big responsibility] whenever you're writing and making a movie about somebody's life because so many people get to know them strictly through this movie and exclusively through this movie, so you want your portrayal to be as accurate as you can make it, warts and all of course." (McWeeney)

This statement indicates that the source text is not solely Michael Lewis' book, but it also includes the real persons depicted in the adaptation. In that case, it might not be completely accurate to define the film as an adaptation based on the book alone. In a broader adaptation context, it is also worth noting that being able to observe and talk to the film's characters in real life is obviously only an option to those who choose to adapt texts based on real-life events with people who are still alive. This might be why Hutcheon, as mentioned earlier, notes that fiction source texts are granted an axiomatic primacy and authority, because often this is all the screenwriter has to work with. However, in the case of non-fiction accounts, there is no one clear source of the story, and if the director wants to be truthful about the events should he be faithful to the source text or to the sources themselves? As Hutcheon points out, an adaptation based on real-life events is not necessarily historically accurate because "it is a paraphrase or translation of a particular other text, a particular interpretation of history. The seeming simplicity of the familiar label, 'based on a true story,' is a ruse: in reality, such historical adaptations are as complex as historiography itself" (18). This suggests that the truthfulness of any film based on real-life events is difficult to determine, maybe even

irrelevant, because no one can claim to know or own the one and only truth. As humans, everyone experiences the world through their own subjective perspective.

This problematic relationship with the truth is evident in both the book and the film, and it is particularly evident in the narrative techniques. They both tell the story of Michael Oher's journey from homeless black son of a crack-addicted mother to being adopted by wealthy, white parents, and a career in the NFL, but it is striking that they both tell the story through the perspective of others. Rarely do we hear or see the perspective of Oher himself. Fundamentally, they tell the story of how other people experienced Oher's journey. His own voice is noticeably absent, but the real person behind the story broke the silence after the film's success. Oher (with Don Yeager) published his own account in 2011, two years after the film and five years after Lewis' book was published. His account differs in many respects from the book and the film, but it is not necessarily a better representation of the truth. He was after all a young boy who experienced years of traumatic events through his young eyes and his perspective is only one of many. It could be argued that all accounts are both true and untrue depending on the perspective of the narrator. That is one of the reasons why film adaptations based on non-fiction accounts do not benefit from being compared to the source text(s), but should instead be analyzed as what they are – films.

## **2.4 Michael Oher's story versus the story of Michael Oher**

As stated above, the book by Michael Lewis tells the story of Michael Oher through testimonies from people who know him. However, it is worth noting that utilizing this narrative technique might be a conscious choice made by the author, but it could also be due to the nature of the subject of the story, as Lewis recalls the process of writing the book:

Michael was a funny subject because, at least at first, he had so little interest in talking about himself. ... When I asked Michael about his past, he claimed not to recall it and couldn't understand why I found it interesting. He wasn't happy to let people get to know him, and it didn't appear he was going to make an exception for me. After a year of pestering him, I felt doomed to learn about my main character exclusively from others. Then one day Michael phoned me out of the blue. "Are you the guy who keeps

asking every other person in the world questions about me when you could just come and ask me?" he said. Our conversations soon became a lot more interesting. He remembered much about his past, often in vivid detail. (339)

In other words, Oher did provide information for the book, but his story is not told from his perspective. The narrator tells his story, and quotes him in exactly the same way as the other characters. Not only does Oher say little, his reluctance to speak is pointed out in the book:

Michael listened to the hearty Cajun coach for a good thirty minutes, as he listened to the other coaches, only in Coach O's case there was a twist: Michael couldn't understand a word he said. . . . "It was scary," said Michael later. "I never heard anything like that." Leigh Anne, Collins, and Sean Junior were equally lost. . . .

Still, as Michael never said anything to the coaches, or even signaled non-verbally his interest in what had been said, he was, in his way, Coach O's ideal listener. He sat in silence and pretended to understand. When Coach O finally finished, Michael asked his first sincere, formal question of the entire five months' recruiting process.

"What," he asked, "are you going to do for the kids that already committed to Ole Miss?"

"My jaw about hit the floor," said Collins, who had been fixing something in the kitchen. "Michael spoke!" (192)

Why Oher chose to speak for the first time after five months of listening to recruiters is not related in the book, and maybe he did not volunteer his thoughts either. Oher relates his involvement with the writing process in this way:

For a long time . . . I was pretty unaware of what Lewis was doing as he tried to get my story right for his book. He had talked to me about wanting to work me into a book he was working on, but that just sounded so crazy to me that I didn't give it a lot of thought and I didn't share much information with him. I mean, what was so interesting about me? Who would want to write a book about my life? What was there even to say that would fill up a newspaper column, let alone two hundred or more pages? Besides,



I had tried to put a lot of stuff out of my mind in order to make it to where I was. ... Eventually, I got the message that this Michael Lewis guy was actually planning to do something with my story. I had started hearing from people that he had talked to them about me – it seemed he had talked to everyone about me. So I decided to do two things that I thought were important: I googled his name and I gave him a call. (202)

In the end, Michael Oher ended up contributing to the book, but it is still not narrated from his perspective. He is a character in the book, just like everyone else. The book is, however, not exclusively about Oher, but features two storylines where one is about the evolution of the left tackle position in American football, and Oher's story serves as a face to illustrate this position and works as the other storyline. What is interesting in this context is that the way Oher is portrayed in the source text probably influenced the depiction of him as a passive player in his own life in the film a great deal. However, the source text also conveys an image of Oher as someone who is determined to succeed, which is not included in the film, like in these lines: "Michael noted his outcome and concluded that his life was always going to work out. He refused to believe that there was ever the faintest possibility that he was going to be anything other than a huge success" (Lewis 325). This passage illustrates clearly that the film adapter chose to only adapt specific parts of the book.

## **2.5 What is an original?**

The film adapted parts of Lewis' book, and in so doing it also took liberties in reordering the plot and leaving characters out. In this regard, *The Blind Side* has several things in common with the historical fiction film. The notion of historical fiction sounds like an oxymoron, because it appears counter-intuitive that a film can be both historical and fictional at the same time. Sara Brinch notes that: "When addressing the question of what constitutes an original in relation to the concept of adaptation, the genre of the historical fiction film is particularly interesting because of its double reference, to existing representational artifacts and to the past itself" (224). This double reference further complicates the attempt to narrow down the original to one source text, and it indicates that it is not a fruitful endeavor to limit the original in such a manner.

Instead, it could be more fruitful to see the original as a dialogue between written sources and historical accounts. Brinch concludes that “[a]n adaptation of non-fiction sources must be studied as an intertextual and multi-referential universe. At the same time, I maintain that to be regarded as an adaptation, there has to be a main original that provides a story to be adapted, and that this original is somehow announced or traceable by the discourses surrounding the film” (240). Oher was neither famous nor was his story public knowledge before the book was published, although he was making a name for himself in the world of sports due to his athletic abilities around the time of publication. Yet, as Michael Lewis’ research for the book showed, his story is traceable, and after the publication of the book, it was featured in several newspaper articles in the three years leading up to the release of the film. However, despite articles in *The New York Times Magazine*, *Reader’s Digest* and *People Magazine*, far from everyone knew the story before watching *The Blind Side* in theaters, and the lack of knowledge of the original also influenced the adaptation.

## **2.6 The film’s status as an adaptation**

Even though Michael Oher was quite famous by the time of the release of the film, in part due to the book and in part due to his career as a football player, he was by no means a household name, and it is fair to assume that many people who watched the film in theaters were not aware of the film’s status as an adaptation beforehand. Additionally, the film checks the box for the sub-category ‘based on a true story.’ According to Thomas Leitch, the label based on a true story “appears only when it is to the film’s advantage” (282), meaning among other things that it suggests an authorless, direct link to historical or biographical events, which is why these types of films are often not treated as adaptations. Leitch suggests that “[t]he point of claiming that a film is based on a true story is not to establish truth or fidelity to the truth as a predicate of the discourse but to use the category of the true story as a privileged master text that justifies the film’s claims to certain kinds of authority – ideally by placing them beyond question” (286).

*The Blind Side* does not introduce itself as based on a true story in the opening credits, but it does say that the film is “based on the book by Michael Lewis.” In the end credit of the film it is explained what happened after the end of the story told by the film, giving the first hint that the film has direct links to real people. Later in the end credits, several private photos of the

family and Miss Sue (the private tutor) are displayed, together with a video from the 2009 NFL draft, and, at the very end, the following statement: “This film is based upon Michael Lewis’ book *The Blind Side: Evolution of a Game* and public records. Dialogue, certain events, and characters contained in the film were created for the purpose of dramatization.” This indicates that the film does not wish to draw attention to its status as based on a true story initially, but does so when the film ends, so as to say “isn’t this inspirational?” and “look how spot on the casting was.” Hancock’s own words indicate that he was aiming for an equivalent response; when asked about the photos in the end credits he has said: “I almost didn’t do it because I thought is this gilding the lily? I mean I did like the NFL network stuff just to show (unfinished sentence) ... on purpose I didn’t put “based on a true story” upfront ... [b]ecause I wanted it, for some people, to be a little bit of a surprise perhaps as opposed to based on a true story that you always see” (McWeeney).

The film’s status as an adaptation may have been purposefully concealed in the film itself, to be revealed at the end; however, the theatrical release poster is a different story. “Based on the book *The Blind Side: Evolution of a Game*” appears in small print at the bottom of the theatrical release poster with the rest of the credits. At the top of the poster it says in capital letters: “Based on the Extraordinary True Story.” This suggests that the poster tries to downplay the film’s status as an adaptation, but instead emphasizes its link to real-life events, and thus de-emphasizes its literary source text. In summary, the film reveals that it has a literary source quite early, but saves the link to real-life events as a surprise at the end, suggesting that it wants to communicate to the spectators something like: “This is an incredible story, but this really happened, so you cannot question the credibility of the story.”

## **2.7 Where exactly did the story begin?**

The cited interview, the poster and the opening and end credits all indicate that the book is at least one of the source texts for the adaptation. This fact was formally noted on both the poster and in the credits, but it was not given a prominent position. In fact, compared to the bold statement “Based on the Extraordinary True Story” on the poster, and the video and photos in the end credits, the emphasis is placed on the status of a true story. Films based on a true story are usually adaptations, in the sense that they have a literary precursor, but not always, even though this fact often escapes spectators.

Further, the screenwriter took inspiration from the real people behind the book, which can be argued to be another source text in an intertextual sense. In the end credit disclaimer statement, public records are also mentioned as source texts, indicating that the adaptation has at least three main source texts. The film's link to these source texts will be further explored in the following chapters.

## **3 Cultural Economy Theory - Methodology and Applicability**

### **3.1 The adaptation process in the context of cultural economy theory**

#### **3.1.1 Background**

In the previous chapter I attempted to trace the sources, or the points of origin, of the film adaptation. The objective of this chapter is to analyze the transferring process between the two media using the proposed methodology of cultural economy theory.

In cultural economy theory, the changes that occur in an adaptation are usually designed to help the adaptation survive in the current cultural and economic landscape; in other words, to appeal to audiences and critics and generate a certain amount of profit. Both cultural economy theory and meme theory suggest that an adaptation's success should not be assessed by how "faithful" or similar it is to its point of origin, but by how successful it is as a film, in terms of critical and/or financial success. As we have seen, a film's status as an adaptation is only noted if it is to the film's advantage, and if the film is a critical success, the audience is usually not concerned with fidelity.

Towards the end of this chapter I will look at whether *The Blind Side* is a success according to the new framework or not, but first this chapter will be concerned with mapping out and analyzing the process from the story's point of origin to the finished film adaptation, as part of the attempt to theorize the adaptation process within the framework of cultural economy theory.

#### **3.1.2 From book to film**

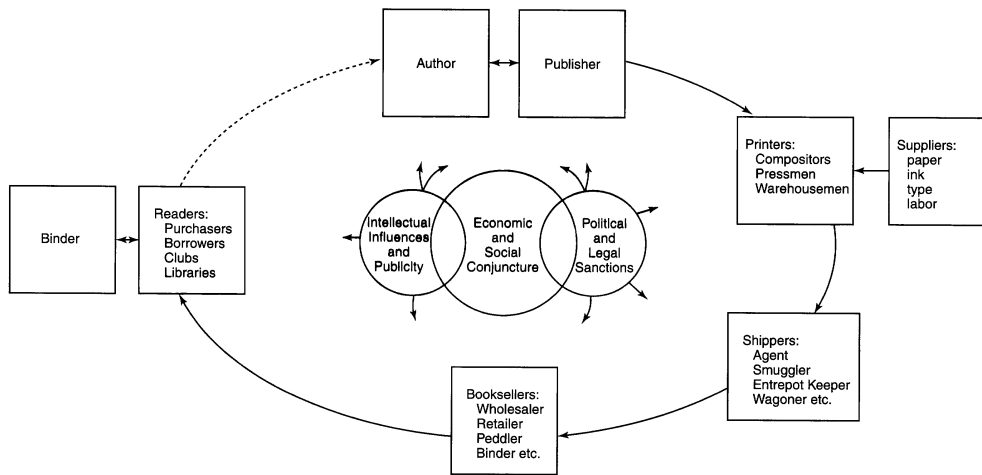
In the case of *The Blind Side*, the adaptation process began when the film's producer Gil Netter reportedly encouraged 20th Century Fox to buy the rights to make a film based on Michael Lewis' *The Blind Side: Evolution of a Game* shortly after its publication in 2006

(McWeeney). He passed it on to screenwriter and director John Lee Hancock, who read the book and submitted his first-draft screenplay to Fox in the fall of 2007, but by summer 2008 it was still no closer to being made into a film (Abramowitz). According to Hancock, the project fell flat when Julia Roberts turned down the lead role of Leigh Anne Tuohy, and thus Fox met Hancock with a plan for “fixing” the script (ibid.). Their solution, according to Hancock, was to “change the leading part from a pistol-packing Southern supermom to a man and redraft the film as a father-son story”, but Fox denies the story (ibid.). Hancock believes Fox’s unwillingness to produce his distinct version of the story could be traced to the film’s unwillingness to conform to their “marketing pigeonholes” (ibid.), i.e. the film did not fit comfortably in any of the usual categories, being neither a full-fledged sports film, nor a chick flick, even though it had a female protagonist. The studio and Hancock’s lists of the ingredients that make a successful film were at odds with each other. Hancock claims that to studios “[i]t can’t be a real movie unless it costs hundreds of millions of dollars and has to have all the effects, and 16-year-old boys need to want to see it to be successful. That simply isn’t true” (ibid.). To him, the film had something for everybody, making it belong to a category so undefined and unmarketable it was a risk the major studio was not prepared to take.

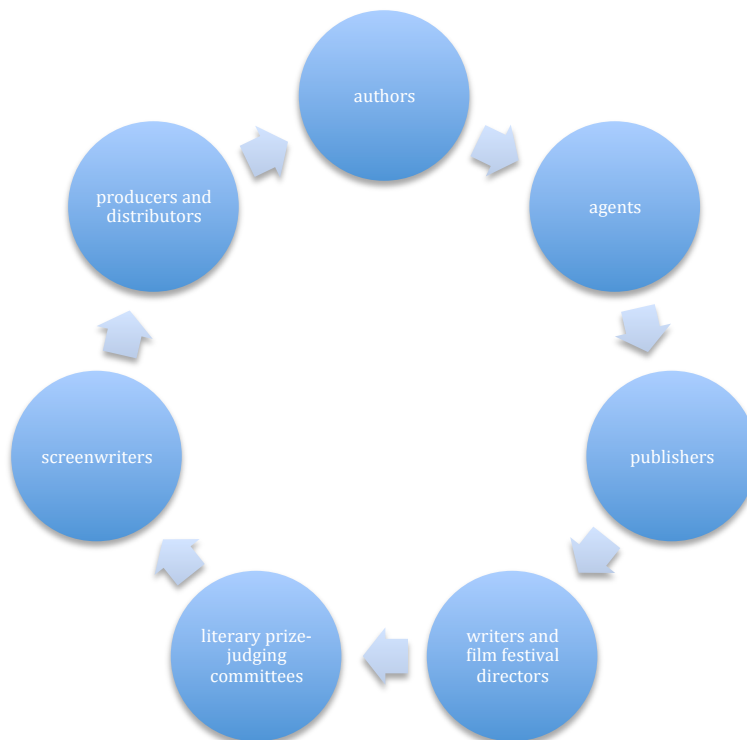
The solution emerged in the form of Alcon Entertainment, a production company financially backed by Memphis-based FedEx founder, Frederick Smith. Incidentally, he is also an old friend of the Tuohys and his youngest son, Cannon, dates the Tuohy’s daughter Collins (Abramowitz). The process of releasing the script from Fox took six weeks before, finally, the pre-production work could continue.

### **3.2 Murray’s Adaptation Circuit**

Murray’s proposal for a new sociology of adaptation as described above is very suggestive, and drawing inspiration from book history suggests that the adaptation industry works similarly to the book industry. In book history the production, distribution and consumption of books is understood as a circular movement, illustrated by Robert Darnton’s Communications circuit (1982).

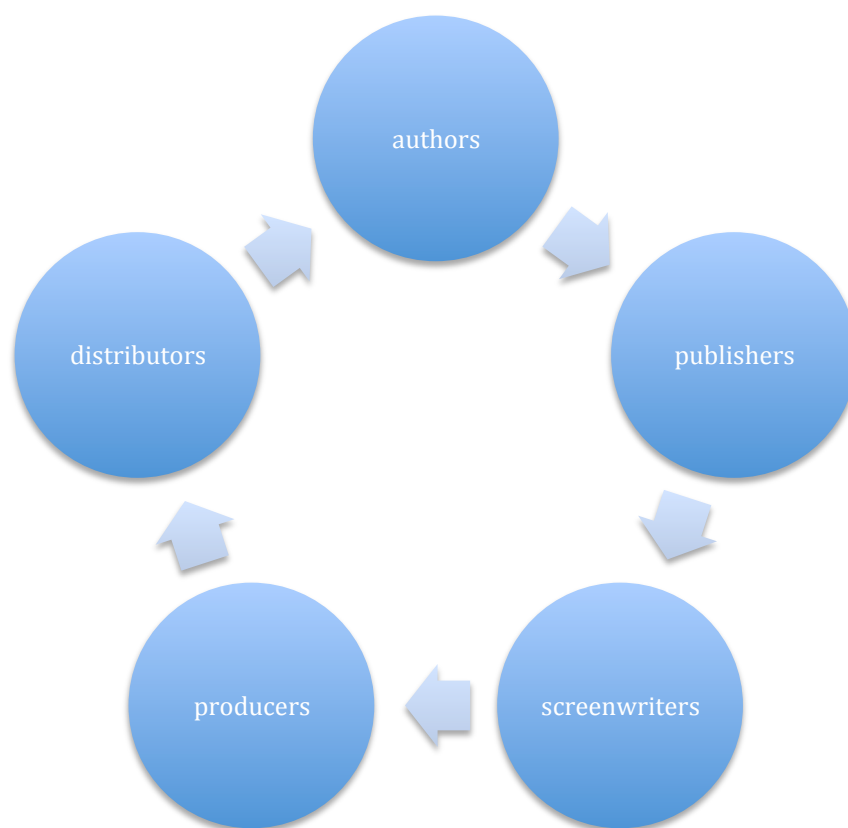


Murray has not yet attempted to replicate the model and adapt it to adaptation studies. Still, she clearly draws inspiration from it in her disposition of the book *The Adaptation Industry*, which is divided into six chapters about the author, agents, book fairs and screen festivals, literary-prize winners, the screenwriter and lastly, producers and distributors. To illustrate this visually I have taken the liberty of making my own (simplified) model based on Murray's selection of industry agents and Darnton's communications circuit.



*My own model design.*

My main concern with this model is that I believe it places too much emphasis on the success of the book or source text. As Murray has demonstrated, bestselling and award-winning books are frequently adapted, but this is far from a defining characteristic of adapted source texts. I would argue that while it is probably true in some cases that film festivals and prize-judging committees play a part in the adaptation industry and contribute to determining which books are made into films, it is not always the case, and including it in the model results in a model that is too specific and only applies to adaptations of bestsellers. I think a more suggestive adaptation circuit which can apply to more, if not all, film adaptations includes the following agents: authors; publishers; screenwriters; producers; and distributors. For this reason, I suggest a model adapted to the revised list of agents and I will attempt to analyze whether it is sufficient to account for the whole communications circuit of film adaptations.



*Revised model to fit all adaptations.*

### **3.3 Authors**

The author's role in the adaptation economy is more than just the point of origin for the story. Murray notes that "twenty-first-century authorship is no longer a single medium (or even print-specific) role" (41). This was illustrated by Michael Lewis' journey to becoming an



adapted author. He originally intended to write a magazine piece on why the left tackle had become much more highly paid than other offensive linemen, when he learned that his childhood friend Sean Tuohy's adopted son was "being hounded by college football coaches who saw in him a future NFL left tackle" (Lewis 336). Lewis was intrigued by Oher's story, but felt awkward about digging into his kindergarten friend's family life for a story. When his wife learned about Oher's story and Lewis's hesitation, she reportedly said: "Why are you writing about anything else?" (Tuohy et al 168). The Tuohys recount the story in their book on cheerful giving: "Lewis called us ... and asked if we'd mind if he did a piece about Michael for the Times. ... We all agreed to give Lewis the go-ahead. So that's how Lewis came to author the book entitled *The Blind Side*, which was excerpted in the *New York Times Magazine* in a piece called *The Ballad of Big Mike*" (ibid.).

The story that was originally going to be a magazine piece grew so much in scope that Lewis decided it had to become a book. In the end, an excerpt from the book, adapted into a piece called *The Ballad of Big Mike* was published in the *New York Times Magazine* around the time of the book's publication. This means that the story was published both in non-fiction book and magazine format almost simultaneously as a preplanned strategy. The two formats were also made available in two mediums, print and online.

Shortly thereafter, the rights to a film version was bought by 20th Century Fox and the long and obstacle-filled road of pre-production, as related above, began. The author's role technically ends at this stage, but sometimes he or she is involved in the production of the adaptation as screenwriter, producer, or a different crew member. However, author Michael Lewis was given the common role of not playing a role in the production at all; a choice he understands:

The best writer in Hollywood is a dead writer. I mean, it would be better if I was dead, as an author. I have no place in the process! None. I mean, I've written this book. Someone will need to come along, like John Lee [Hancock] did, and if it's going to be any good, they've got to sort of break it and redo it, as they did. The last thing you want is some writer hovering over his material, moaning and groaning about what they do with it. And the last thing I want to be is that. So that's kind of it. (Yuan)

However, what is interesting when you look at the model of the adaptation circuit, is that because of its circularity, the author appears a second time after the producers and distributor have completed their tasks, and the author is invited to the premiere (as seen in the previous chapter) to give credibility to the film adaptation. Then it is the publisher's turn to publish the movie tie-in edition or a new print run of the book, but after that the circulation comes to an end, perhaps forever, or until someone wants to make a new adaptation of the source text.

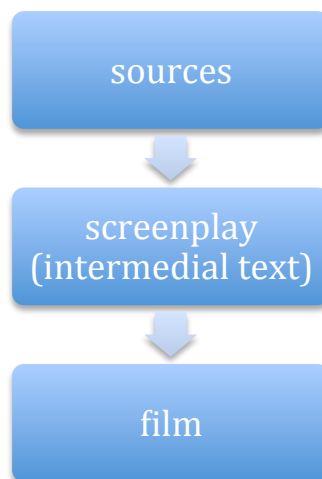
### **3.4 Publishers**

Selling the film rights and having the book adapted has obvious economic advantages to publishers. First off, they receive money in exchange of the film rights, regardless of whether the film is ever made. If the project does come out on the other side of “development hell”, a limbo state where progress is slow or comes to a complete stop (Wikipedia.org), and the film finds an audience, it has the potential of garnering new interest in the source text. This is somewhat dependent on the film's status as an adaptation. As we have seen, many films do not draw attention to their status as adaptations. However, if the link to the source text is successfully communicated then the publisher can take the common step of adding the label “Now a major motion picture” to the book's cover and publish a movie-tie in edition, usually with artwork from the film (Bruhn 73).

W W Norton, which published *The Blind Side*, did both of these things. On their website they claim that the movie tie-in edition (possibly together with other editions) have sold more than one million copies. A respectable figure for a sports strategy book, but not even close to the number of people who bought tickets to see the adaptation in movie theaters. The film made \$34 million in its opening weekend alone (boxofficemojo.com), a number even more impressive when noting that it opened against the sequel in the *Twilight* series. However, this did not concern Alcon executives, as their marketing strategy was aimed at the more vampire adverse segments of the public, as we shall see in the marketing section.

### 3.5 Screenwriters

The screenwriter is generally an overlooked agent in the adaptation circuit, seen as a necessary evil to take the film from a lexical text to a “visual text”. The screenwriter usually takes the first step in the creative part of the adaptation process, when he or she re-envision the text as a film and writes an adaptation of the source text. However, the shooting script is rarely read by anyone outside the business, and thus it is usually the director who is credited for the actual adaptation of the text by directing actors and making decisions about the sets, the camera positions, the editing and everything else that goes into the process of making a film. In reality, one could argue that the screenwriter is the first adapter and the author of an intermedial text, which is later adapted by everyone involved in the shooting process under the direction of the director. I have attempted to illustrate the process below:



A lot can happen in the transferring process from source text to screenplay, and many things did happen in the case of *The Blind Side*. One major change worth noting is the change of genre. Robert Stam claims that “the art of filmic adaptation partially consists in choosing which generic conventions are transposable into the new medium, and which need to be discarded, supplemented, transcoded, or replaced” (6). Lewis’ source text belongs to the non-fiction genre, which is very well suited to presenting two parallel storylines, one about the evolution of the left tackle position in American football and the other a biography of a football player. The length of the book allows the author to elaborate where necessary and introduce as many characters as he pleases. The book can be categorized in the genre of non-fiction sports literature.

The screenplay discarded most of the story that was not directly related to Michael Oher's life, except the football game that illustrates why the left tackle position came to be so important and well paid. The major restructuring of the storylines and the plot has arguably changed the genre of the story to a (sports) drama film. There is a sports theme present, but it is not the main focus of the story, and there is no big game, which is usually found in sports films. Instead, the focus is on the relationship between the Tuohys and Michael, and between Leigh Anne and Michael in particular. The main storyline is about how a poor and uneducated African-American boy came to fulfill his major athletic and academic potential with the help of a white, Christian family. This last aspect in particular has been the main focus of criticism against the film, as some viewers, and especially film critics, have found the film to have a white savior narrative. It is likely that this focus on a white family helping a black, young man is emphasized by the film's limited character gallery and compressed timeline, as the book gives a significantly more nuanced account.

The book relates how many different families, both black and white, helped Michael with a place to stay and food both before and after being admitted to Briarcrest Christian School, which is where he first met the Tuohys (Lewis 47; 86). However, this is not included in the adaptation, which has omitted the majority of Oher's life before he meets the Tuohys. The film shows how all the Tuohys take turns noticing Michael at school, before Sean and Leigh Anne see him by the side of the road one day during Thanksgiving break and take him home with them, after which he never leaves. In the book, however, Sean Tuohy is the first to notice Michael at school, where he volunteers as an assistant basketball coach:

When Sean Tuohy first spotted Michael Oher sitting in the stands in the Briarcrest gym, staring at basketball practice, he saw a boy with nowhere to go but up. The question was how to take him there. . . . Sean had seen Big Mike around the halls three or four times. He'd noticed that he wore the same clothes every day: cutoff blue jeans and an oversized T-shirt. Now he saw him in the stands and thought: *I'll bet he's hungry*. Sean walked over and said, "You don't know me, but we have more in common than you might think."

Michael Oher stared intently at his feet.

“What did you have to eat for lunch today?” Sean asked.

“In the cafeteria,” said the kid.

“I didn’t ask where you ate,” said Sean. “I asked what you ate.”

“Had a few things,” said the kid.

*Sure you did*, thought Sean. He asked if he needed money for lunch, and Mike said, “I don’t need any money.”

The next day, Sean went to the Briarcrest accounting department and arranged for Michael Oher to have a standing charge card at the lunch checkout counter. He’d done the same for several of the poorer black kids who had come to Briarcrest. (Lewis 60; 66)

A few weeks later, one cold morning during Thanksgiving break, Sean is out driving with Leigh Anne when they see Michael stepping out of a bus and he tells her that he is the student he has been telling her about (Lewis 66). They pull over and ask him about where he is going, whereby Michael responds:

“To basketball practice,” says Big Mike.

“Michael, you don’t have basketball practice,” says Sean.

“I know,” says the boy. “But they got heat there.”

Sean didn’t understand that one.

“It’s nice and warm in that gym,” said the boy.

As they drove off, Sean looked over and saw tears streaming down Leigh Anne’s face.

And he thought: *Uh-oh, my wife’s about to take over*. (Lewis 67)

In their memoir, the Tuohys claim that they offered to take him home, which he refused, and that they then insisted on taking him to the nearest bus stop because they knew that the gym was closed (Tuohy et al 10-11). Neither Lewis nor the Tuohys do, however, claim that Michael came home with them to stay on the sofa that day, as the event is displayed in the film. More than anything, this choice might have been made to compress the duration of the film; nevertheless, it also gives the impression that the Tuohys brought him into their home almost immediately after noticing him at Briarcrest.

According to Lewis, the next day Leigh Anne goes to Briarcrest and takes Michael out shopping, after which she returns him at what she assumes is his mother's house (67-72). At the time, Michael alternates between spending the night with at least five different Briarcrest families (Lewis 86). It is not stated in the book when Michael came to stay with the Tuohys the first time, but it is briefly mentioned that he alternates between staying with several Briarcrest families, including the Tuohys during an eight-month period (Lewis 83), before the event that would lead to his permanent stay:

One night after track meet, Michael was left without a ride home and Leigh Anne offered to take him wherever he wanted to go. "Terio's," he said, and off they went . . . thirty miles into Mississippi. "It was a trailer," she said. From the outside she couldn't believe there was room enough inside the place for him. She insisted on following him in, to see where he slept. There she found an old air mattress on the floor, flat as a leaf. "I blow it up every night," he said. "But it runs out of air around midnight." "That's it," she said. "Get all your crap. You're moving in with me." . . . For the next couple of weeks Michael slept on the Tuohys' sofa, and no one in the family stated the obvious: this was Michael Oher's new home. (Lewis 86-87)

This clearly demonstrates that during the adaptation process the source text material has been reworked by omitting a significant part of it, and compressing the timeline of the parts that were adapted. The implication is that the film gives the impression of Michael as a homeless boy who is rescued by a Christian, white family immediately after noticing his difficult situation, while the source text shows the complexity of his living arrangements for a long period of time and the many events leading up to Michael's first stay with the Tuohys, and how it evolved into a permanent arrangement.

The source text material went through major changes in the adaptation process, more specifically in the writing of the screenplay, and I will argue that this happened because it migrated to favorable conditions and to become a film with a significant market potential. The book was successful in terms of sales for sports literature, but had the movie adapted the same narrative as the book, it is doubtful that it would have found such a large audience as it did. By focusing on the interpersonal relationships in the story, the film appealed to a lot more

people than those who have an interest in football strategy and the life of a single football player. The narrative technique is also quite different in the sense that the film does not tell Oher's story through testimonies from people in his life and a narrator, as the book does, but by showing thoughtfully and strategically chosen scenes from his life, many of which are not even in the source text material.

For instance, the book states that when Michael went shopping with Leigh Anne he chose a brown and yellow rugby shirt, and he proceeded to wear this shirt very often until it was completely worn out (Lewis 70; 83). In the film, we see him buying the shirt despite Leigh Anne's reservations and later wearing it to school. There, he meets Sean Junior who advises him to not wear the shirt because it makes him "look like a giant bumblebee", although this episode is not narrated in the source text.

Similarly, the book draws parallels between Oher and the character Ferdinand the Bull because "he didn't exhibit the anger of his breed" (Lewis 80), meaning that everyone expected him to be aggressive and forceful because of his abusive background, but instead he was gentle and quiet. In the film this is conveyed in a scene where Leigh Anne is reading *The Story of Ferdinand* to Sean Junior and Michael in bed; another scene that was invented by the screenwriter, or at least not found in the source text. It is an example of taking a lexical meaning from the book and making it visual and a subtler message in the film, provided that the audience is familiar with the story of Ferdinand the Bull.

These are some examples, but not an exhaustive list, of how the role of the screenwriter has influenced the adaptation in this case. The next person in the circuit is the director, which in this case was the same as the screenwriter. When shooting is complete, the job of convincing people to watch it begins, and this is a job for the producers and distributors.

### **3.6 Producers and distributors**

The producers have a wide range of tasks during all stages of production, not just the marketing. As we have seen, the producer Gil Netter was the person who took an interest in Lewis' book to begin with and who initiated the adaptation process. Later, when the project

moved to Alcon Entertainment the producers had to make several important decisions, which would be crucial to the film's potential success.

The film's modest budget of \$35 million meant that casting would be crucial for garnering interest and communicating what kind of film it was to the right people. The presidents of Alcon felt that a successful actress was needed "to give the project big-screen credibility" and Sandra Bullock was a coveted candidate (Abramowitz). The problem was that Bullock's standard fee was \$10 million plus 10% of the gross, almost a third of the whole production budget. Instead, she was offered \$5 million upfront and a greater percentage of the profits, which she accepted. To play Leigh Anne's husband Sean, they hired famous country musician Tim McGraw, who has a large fan base of his own. The two principal roles were now occupied by two big names according to plan. The role of Michael Oher demanded a different strategy. Oher's athletic success is in large part due to his unique physique. To find an African-American actor who was tall and big, but not obese, and with large arms and legs, would prove to be a difficult task for the casting department. Hancock recounts how they found Quinton Aaron, who would be cast as Michael Oher:

. . . they ponied up for a nation-wide search, which we knew we were going to have to do since you can't exactly call [Creative Artists Agency] and say send over somebody of this stature to play this age and all that. And it was really difficult trying to get the casting directors to understand that I needed someone who was tall, but not just tall, but they couldn't be obese and they had to look like an athlete at least and to play a certain age, and so it's literally a big task. And I would get rail thin guys, you know, but they'd go "but he's 6'7", yes but he weighs 200 lbs. He's a small forward, not a left tackle. And finally the casting director out of New York . . . called me and said "I've got him" and I've heard that many times before, but she sent the tape out and I watched it and thought that Quinton had real possibilities. (McWeeney)

After Quinton Aaron was cast, it was imperative to pair him with an actor with the right chemistry to play young Sean Junior. According to Hancock, Jae Head was not cast until about a week before shooting started after flying him out to meet Aaron. Head had the right sports background, but more importantly he had to be a driving force in the relationship



between SJ and Michael, and Hancock notes that "... Jae came in and he's just a bundle of energy. So he and Quinton together were pretty great" (ibid.).

Each agent in the adaptation circuit performs a significant role in the making of the film adaptation, but are some agents more important than others? This goes to the core of Murray's cultural economy theory, which is to understand how adaptations circulate in cultural and economic contexts, and further how they become successful. Murray notes that:

. . . a film is increasingly "made" in terms of its popular perception as much by its marketing campaign and distribution pattern as it is by the images and sounds recorded upon its negative. Indeed, if marketing is unsuccessful or non-existent, those recorded images and sounds may never be experienced by an audience beyond the coterie of the film's creative and technical personnel. Therefore, in a very real – if counter-intuitive – sense producers and distributors make film adaptations. (158-159)

According to Murray, marketing "makes" the adaptation, because the film's success depends on the audience's reception. Director Hancock claimed that one of the reasons Fox declined to go forward with his screenplay was that the story did not fit into any of their "marketing pigeonholes," and it was deemed too hard or risky to market. When the film rights and the screenplay were acquired by Alcon Entertainment and their distributor Warner Bros., they took a completely different approach to the marketing aspect of the project.

In Hancock's words *The Blind Side* had something for everyone, but in order to reach out to everyone Warner Bros. chose to focus the publicity towards several niche markets. This strategy proved to be even more successful than expected, exceeding the film's expected gross, and when it also surpassed the blockbuster *Twilight* sequel *New Moon* in its third weekend, it caught the attention of Hollywood (Hampp). Instead of making a film that would sit comfortably in a marketing pigeonhole, "the filmmakers had taken extraordinary steps to create a story that would appeal to disparate constituencies that were only in some ways connected to one another", according to an article in *The New York Times* (Cieply and Schwartz). These steps included, but were not limited to, recruiting several well-known

college football coaches to play themselves, to attract a male sports-oriented audience; similarly Sandra Bullock undoubtedly attracted female fans as well as those who appreciate a female protagonist; black viewers were likely drawn to the film by Michael Oher's beginning success in the world of sports and his inspirational story; for families it was easy to be tempted by a movie about a very special family; and Tim McGraw may have brought some of the music crowd; and last, but not least, the film's focus on religion was used to appeal to the churchgoers with the help of Grace Hill Media.

In particular, the last step may have been responsible for pushing *The Blind Side* to the top of the box office. Despite Christianity's prominent position in American society, Christians are very often overlooked in film marketing, maybe because, despite their size, approaching a faith-based audience is considered niche marketing. However, as the real life Tuohys are Evangelical Christians and as Hancock felt that there was something for everyone in the film, it made sense to reach out to the Christian community. Alcon Entertainment and Warner Bros. hired Grace Hill Media, a firm specializing in marketing Christian-friendly films through its database of 155,000 ministry professionals and more than 1 million consumers (Hampp). Modern churches often feature big screens and thus pastors can download clips to illustrate their sermons, which is how more than 20,000 churches came to download clips from *The Blind Side*, exposing the film to approximately 8 million people who were likely to see it (ibid.). In the end, the film's presumed disadvantage as having something for everyone turned out to be its advantage, but not without the careful marketing strategy of niche marketing.

This indicates that the marketing of a film does, as Murray suggests, make the film. Without successful marketing, the film will not be exposed to enough viewers to become a critical or financial success, thus failing as an adaptation and as a film. This is an important step in understanding why some adaptations are more successful than others; most probably it is not only the aesthetic choices made in the adaptation process that determine the film's success, but the marketing and distribution play an almost equally important part in the film's communications circuit.

This analysis of the transferring process from source text to film, seen through the roles of the agents in the adaption circuit suggests that the simplified model, inspired by Murray's

proposal for a new sociology of adaptation, might be sufficient to theorize the adaptation process and begin to understand why and how adaptations are made, and why they are successful, not from an aesthetic point of view, but a financial and critical one.

### **3.7 Criteria of success**

#### **3.7.1 Financial success**

Despite premiering alongside the much-anticipated *Twilight* film, *The Blind Side* was a surprise hit at the box office, and not even the producers had foreseen the figures that were reported after the opening weekend, let alone the total income. The producers had expected *The Blind Side* to earn a similar amount to *Walk the Line*, which ultimately grossed \$120 million after opening to \$22 million in 2005 (Cieply and Schwartz). Naturally, it was a pleasant surprise when *The Blind Side's* opening weekend income surpassed the film's budget by \$4 million and came in as number two at the box office, but no one was prepared for what happened next; in its third weekend it climbed to the number one position at the box office and from the premiere on it stayed in the top ten for ten consecutive weeks (boxofficemojo.com). Nearly one year after its domestic release the total worldwide earnings came in just above \$309 million with the foreign income constituting 17.2% (ibid.).

In light of these numbers, I think it is uncontroversial to claim that the film adaptation of *The Blind Side* was a major financial success, beyond what anyone had dared hope for. Thus, it fulfills one of the criteria for a successful adaptation according to cultural economy theory.

Nonetheless, what is interesting to note in terms of the percentage domestic earnings and the foreign earnings, is that more than 82 percent of the total worldwide income was domestic. The reason is likely that the film appealed less to audiences abroad, combined with the effect of the marketing, which focused mainly on the domestic audience. Likewise, the film may have appealed less to foreigners to some extent because of the subject matter of American football and Southern culture. Especially in Europe, the religiosity and the gun toting can be perceived as foreign to some viewers, not to mention the racial and socio-economic inequality, which is regarded as quite conservative compared to most Western nations.

Likewise, the film's main attractions in terms of casting, such as the coaches who did cameos, are for the most part strangers to audiences outside North America. Even Tim McGraw, who played one of the principal parts, was not likely to draw a significant amount of people to theaters outside the US country music scene. In terms of marketing, its emphasis was on the American churchgoers and sports fans. After Julia Roberts turned down the part of Leigh Anne, Sandra Bullock was the one who was most likely to attract an international audience, and so she contributed both to the financial success and the critical success, and in the end she was the only one to win an Oscar.

### **3.7.2 Critical success**

Just three months after *The Blind Side's* premiere, the Academy revealed the nominees for the prestigious Oscar, and *The New York Times* reported that “[t]he whoops and giggles, heard ... as Anne Hathaway announced that “The Blind Side” was in the pool of 10 best picture nominees at the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, were the sound of Hollywood surprising itself” (Cieply and Schwartz). In addition to the best picture nomination, Bullock was nominated for best actress, an award she had never before been nominated for. In the end, the role she had felt she just could not get right would be the one to earn her her first Oscar and drastically alter her career (ibid.).

The attention surrounding the Oscar nominations was undoubtedly an advantage to the film, and it is likely that many viewers watched the film in theaters thanks to the nominations. The critical reviews were mixed, but mostly positive, which also gave the film a boost at the box office (metacritic.com). Since the criteria of success according to the new framework is the same for both cultural economy theory and meme theory, I have provided a detailed analysis of the financial success above, since cultural economy theory deals with the economy of the adaptation industry, and I will analyze the critical success in the following chapter, since meme theory is more concerned with the content and the aesthetic aspect of the adaptation.

## **4 Meme Theory - Methodology and Applicability**

### **4.1 The adaptation process in the context of meme theory**

#### **4.1.1 Background**

Meme theory suggests that stories migrate to favorable conditions in the adaptation process, and that this could explain the “whys” of film adaptation; in other words, why the adapters change the things they do. In the process of analyzing the “whys”, it seems natural to investigate how the changes came about.

We have seen that meme theory indicates that all adaptations go through a mutational process of replication and change, similar to that of genes. New memes are best fitted for survival if they are adapted to the new and current context, hence the change. In the following I will attempt to identify the different memes that make up the source text and analyze which memes survived the mutational process of the adaptation into a film and, most importantly, why these particular memes survived and not others. Similarly, I want to explore why some memes were omitted. Lastly, I will examine whether or not meme theory can explain why some memes appear to be better suited for survival than others. This chapter will look at the adaptation process in the context of meme theory.

### **4.2 Adaptation as mutation**

As we have seen, cultural economy theory and what I have called Murray’s adaptation circuit has proved fruitful as a methodology to create an overview of the adaptation process and subsequently to analyze each agent in the process to understand how each step has influenced the adaptation product. Although meme theory has a similar aim of explaining why adaptations are made the way they are and consequently how we ought to study them, its methodology is altogether different. In fact, to date, no methodology has been proposed. All meme theory can provide adaptations studies with so far, is a possible explanation of or an analogy to the evolution

of stories in adaptations, based on the theory of evolution by natural selection. The aim of this section is to explore whether it is possible to develop a methodology based on the original understanding of meme theory, and to determine whether this might be useful in adaptation studies; in other words, thus asserting the applicability of meme theory.

In order to achieve this, it is necessary to adapt Dawkins' notion of memes to mean not only (cultural) ideas, but also stories, understood here as the "essence" of adaptations. The essence could also be what Paul Goring calls "allusions," which he defines as "borrowings which invite the informed viewer or reader to make a connection to the earlier work" (113). Just like genes are units that combine to form living organisms and evolve by a process of mutation, memes are units that combine to form stories and evolve by a process of adaptation. One significant difference between these two types of "mutations" is that while evolution by natural selection is not purpose-driven, I will argue that adaptation is. The purpose is more often than not to profit financially from the adaptation. This difference is significant, because in nature mutations will usually occur because they are to a species' advantage, meaning that they are the genes that will make the species best fitted for survival. Although this is also often the aim of, for instance, film adaptations, it is not always the result, probably precisely because the adaptation is purposely driven by overt plans designed by humans, and humans always make mistakes from time to time. For example, sometimes very complex and long books are adapted into simplified and standard-length films, with the purpose of making it more accessible to audiences and a critical or financial success, but the result is a film that is "too simple" and uninteresting to audiences, which is arguably what happened to, for example, Joe Wright's *Pride and Prejudice* (2005) and Peter Flinth's *Beatles* (2014).

#### **4.2.1 Migration to favorable conditions**

In addition to adapting the notion of memes, it is also necessary to acknowledge that it is not sufficient to perform successful adaptations of memes, in the sense of being artistically successful in the eyes of the filmmakers, because the success or survival of the memes depends on the audience's reception, which again in part depends on the marketing of the adaptation. Could we then make the case that the marketing and reception of the adaptation is also a part of the

adaptation process, implicating that the process begins with the source text and ends with the audience reception, resulting in the adaptation product? Can meme theory sufficiently theorize all these factors? On the one hand, the theory is so open or wide that it easily lends itself to adapting it to our needs. On the other hand, it might be too far-fetched to use such a general theory to explain everything that takes place in the adaptation industry. Nevertheless, in the following I will attempt to apply meme theory to the film adaptation of *The Blind Side*. The outcome will indicate how applicable the theory is, and whether further research along these lines is a fruitful endeavor.

#### **4.2.2 Death or survival in the meme pool**

As previously mentioned, a significant “mutation” that occurred in the adaptation process was the change of genre and narrative technique. Can this be said to have been an adjustment, through adaptation, to a particular cultural environment? The choice of omitting the majority of the football strategy part of the source text and to emphasize the relationship between Leigh Anne and Michael was a strategic and intentional choice, despite the source text’s account of how it was Sean who first took an interest in Michael and who was a major player in Michael’s life and his road to success, both academically and as an athlete. It appears to have been a conscious choice to make Sean seem not only indifferent to Michael’s presence, but almost challenging it, so that he would serve as another obstacle for Leigh Anne to overcome in her mission to save Michael. I will argue that this is an example of the story’s migration to favorable conditions, meaning that certain memes go through mutations to form a story with the remaining memes that is better suited for survival at the box office.

It is probable that the meme in the source text was deemed too long and multi-faceted to work on film, and thus it needed simplification and a clearer focus to work as a film. The objective of the adaptation process is not necessarily to tell the whole truth and nothing but the truth, but to result in a successful film (in other words a financial and/or critical success). The mother-son story was favorable to the story told in the source text and so the meme had to be adapted to be better fitted for survival in the merciless film economy. The meme of interpersonal relationships, and

especially those involving mothers and children, is a particularly culturally sustainable meme, which is universal and not dependent on a specific cultural context to work.

Within this framework, there are at least two possible ways of explaining what happened in this process. The first option is to see it as a case of omitting the detailed and nuanced meme of Sean's involvement and Leigh Anne's later entrance into Michael's life and replacing it with a more culturally sustainable meme, namely that of a mother-son story. The second option is to see it as a mutation where the meme from the source text is modified to become a more culturally sustainable meme that will resonate more with the audience and also simplify the story, an advantage to both the film's duration and accessibility.

#### **4.2.3 The reeducation of Michael Oher**

Another interesting meme is one that is perhaps not so easily categorized and hard to detect, and this meme is concerned with Michael's personality and social life. In the book, several people give an account of their impression of Michael at different stages of his journey. His best friend Craig relates that when it was clear that Michael was headed for the NFL people kept saying that he had become cocky, but according to Craig, he had always been cocky, he just did not show it (Lewis 327). In fact, from an early age he was determined to become the next Michael Jordan and he made life choices accordingly. He played basketball from an early age; he did not get involved with gangs, even though they surrounded him in Hurt Village; he did not father any children in his teens (or to date), unlike most of his brothers. In conclusion, Michael was determined that sports would be his road out of poverty. He just thought it would be basketball and not football (ibid.).

This is the image of Michael painted in the source text, and it is in stark contrast to his character traits he is given in the film, where he is portrayed as an individual with no will of his own, who just happens to be accepted to Wingate Christian School (Briarcrest in real life) thanks to his athletic abilities, and is saved by a white family. The film does not show that he lives with his mother (after running from foster homes so many times that the government gave up looking for



him by the age of ten) (Lewis 292), but chooses to stay with friends so as not to drown in his mother's problems. He is portrayed as a homeless and helpless boy, instead of as a boy who loves his mother but has realized that he needs to save himself, and thus removes himself from the unhealthy environment in Hurt Village. Michael is not portrayed as a determined young man who chooses to go to a new, white school to further his basketball skills despite not having had a consistent education, but instead he is portrayed as what Burris calls a blank page and an emotional infant (29). However, this image is not an invention on the part of the screenwriter. In fact, the source text gives a double image of Oher. According to himself he was determined to succeed, but according to Leigh Anne Tuohy:

Michael simply could not function without the elaborate support system she had built for him: private tutors, constant monitoring, and a steady drip-drip-drip Chinese cultural reeducation program, administered by her, to assimilate him into their world. . . . Leigh Anne reasoned that, if Michael was going to be part of the family, he had to know what the family knew, and behave like the family behaved. (Lewis 182)

There is a discrepancy between how he presents himself to others and how others perceive him, which is obvious in the book. His dismal academic record and limited experience with the world outside the Memphis ghetto lead people to believe that he has no knowledge about the world, and so much so that Sean Junior, his seven-year-old new brother assumes the role of life coach, volunteering his advice on everything from clothes to football strategy. What can be learned from this is that the meme that conveys this double image in the book has been replicated in the film, but changed so that the focus is on how the world perceives Michael, while he remains a closed book. In other words, the meme of Michael's personality has undergone a considerable mutation, and it has had a significant influence on the perception of the story as a whole.

In the film, the other characters frequently observe Michael, and the story is predominantly told through Leigh Anne's perspective. His apparently passive role during this transformative experience in his life and the adaptation's treatment of class and race has led the film to be labeled as a white savior narrative by several critics. A white savior narrative belongs to the genre

most commonly known as *white savior films* (WSF), which is native to Hollywood and features “a group of lower-class, urban, nonwhites (generally black and Latino/a) who struggle through the social order in general, or the education system specifically. Yet through the sacrifices of a white teacher they are transformed, saved, and redeemed by [the] film’s end” according to Matthew W. Hughey (475). According to him the genre finds success despite the media attention concerning the rise of “new racism” or a “post-racial” society (Hughey 476).

The white savior criticism might be related to the Tuohys’ relationship to charity, which is one of the main themes in the film. In their book, published after the film, the Tuohys explain the philosophy they live by, a notion they have coined the *Popcorn Theory*, which states that: “You can’t help everyone. But you can try to help the hot ones who pop right up in front of your face” (1). Their motivation for cheerful giving is based in their Christian faith, they explain (Tuohy et al 21), and it is likely that the religious adapter, John Lee Hancock, chose to place an emphasis on this aspect of the story, in contrast to what the non-religious Michael Lewis did. Essentially, one might say that the meme of the complex and long struggle that was Michael Oher’s life both before and after the Tuohys has been replicated and changed, drastically, to become the story of how the Tuohys engaged in charity and saved a young boy from poverty. The mutation of this meme has had significant implications for how the film was received by critics and audiences.

#### **4.2.4 The narrative of post-racial progress**

In light of this, it is likely that the personality meme has gone through a mutation to elevate Leigh Anne’s role in the story, and to downplay Michael’s efforts, to amplify her position as main protagonist of the film. The source material suggests that Michael was an extraordinary boy who made great efforts to escape the ghetto, but in the film he is made to look like a lucky stray dog that was literally picked up from the street, because the Tuohys could not bear the injustice of the situation when it appeared right in front of them. The mutation this meme underwent could suggest that, in addition to emphasizing the faith aspect, the adapter subscribes to the narrative of post-racial progress, which seeks to persuade the public that racism is a thing of the past. This has, according to Greg Burris, been in the making for quite some time, but the election of Obama occupies a prominent role in the narrative, while at the same time the American society is

experiencing “real racial problems including widening economic gaps, police brutality, a racist war on drugs, and a growing corporate prison-industrial complex” (25).

Not surprisingly, the reason behind this trend is not a decline in racism, as the notion of ‘post-racial’ would imply, but that “existing power structures and class hierarchies have diversified their strategies . . .” (ibid.). In effect, this means that not only can we now pretend racism no longer exists, we can use this narrative to suggest that it is not the institutions and systems that need to change, it is black people themselves. Awareness of the post-racial discourse is crucial because “[t]hese trends have a tremendous relevance for our assessment of Hollywood, an industry which has not merely been influenced by the discourse of post-racial progress but has been an active contributor to it” (Burriss 25). To categorize films that contribute to this narrative, Burriss has coined the genre he refers to as *the post-9/11 Hollywood race drama*, and *The Blind Side* is the film that comes the closest to fully embodying all of its features (26). This indicates that, whether consciously or not, the adaptation has mutated the meme of Michael’s personality and background to fit into the current context of the ‘post-racial’ era.

However, although a current narrative, the meme’s portrayal of African-Americans is no innovation. There is reason to believe that this particular meme has its roots in the plantation romance, but has undergone mutations to be better fitted for survival in today’s cultural context. The plantation romance (or plantation novel) was one of two dominant genres in the antebellum South (Jones 23), and used a paternalist narrative to portray contented slaves living under the protection of affectionate masters in a family-like community (Schermerhorn 1010). The institution of chattel slavery has since been abolished by law, but slavery in various forms, such as sex trafficking and forced labor, still exists (state.gov). Michael is obviously not a slave in neither the past nor the current definition; nevertheless, Michael Oher can be seen to have a link to the plantation narrative.

Since the abolition of slavery, African-Americans have struggled to be accepted as equal citizens in the United States. This is still reflected in today’s society where the percentage of poverty among black people greatly exceeds the national average of 14.3 percent (2007-2011,

census.gov) with a poverty rate of 25.8 percent. In comparison, the national poverty rate of white people was 11.6 percent in the same period (ibid.). Similarly, people who identify as black or African-American make up 13.2% of the population in the USA in 2013 (census.gov) and 77.7% are white. Despite their minority in numbers, black people made up 37.5% of all inmates in prisons, while white people amounted to 59.1% in December 2014 (bop.gov). In 2014, the estimated population of black people or African-Americans was just above 42 million and nearly 79,000 of them were in prison by the end of the year.

These numbers clearly indicate that social inequality seriously affects black people in contemporary USA, but they fail to explain why not much has changed since the Civil War. Jeffrey Montez de Oca sees a link between the social inequality in the US and what he calls the “postmodern plantation narrative” in *The Blind Side* (142). According to him, the planter economy has been replaced by the service economy and low-wage, abstract labor, which is illustrated in the film: “The Tuohys’ paternal relationship with a homeless and destitute young black man magnifies their goodness but also obscures the fact that their gentility is predicated on the exploitation of low-wage predominantly black and brown labor in Sean Tuohy’s fast-food franchises,” he argues (ibid.). In other words, the institution of chattel slavery has ceased to exist, but it has been replaced by a power structure where affluent white people exploit underserved black people (and others) by paying them as little as the law allows them. This is the other side of the story of private charity: the money donated to low-wage or unemployed families is often accumulated at the expense of the very people who need it, and the very same power structures prevent them from escaping poverty.

#### **4.2.5 The ghetto’s tie to the gated community**

In his article titled *Post-Racial Pipedreams: Race and Class in The Blind Side*, Greg Burris reminds us that “in order to give, first you have to take” (31). He finds it problematic that *The Blind Side* bids audiences to help the downtrodden, but does not explore the political side of social injustice and the fact that the people who make the most money are “those who own the labor of other people” (ibid.). He goes on to explain the double-edged nature of charity:

While charity may often seem like a humanitarian deed that transcends politics, this is simply not the case. Charity *is* political, and in *The Blind Side*, it is framed within very particular (i.e., neoliberal) parameters. Namely, charity is off-loaded onto the private sector, and there is no suggestion that these funds would be better directed towards existing social services or public welfare programs. In addition, while *The Blind Side* has plenty to say about how the Tuohys' wealth is spent, it has nothing to say about how it is made, and *the film fails to acknowledge that the poverty it seeks to alleviate is intrinsically entangled in the same process of capitalist accumulation that line the pockets of rich philanthropists like the Tuohys* (my emphasis). (ibid.)

Without the opportunity to exploit the most downtrodden in society, the Tuohys would probably never have been able to give back to a carefully selected few. The fact that they would seize this opportunity at all is somewhat odd, considering their backgrounds. In their book on cheerful giving, Sean and Leigh Anne go into great detail about their own humble upbringing with parents struggling to make ends meet, and Sean was so poor that he often did not know where his next meal would come from (Tuohy et al 41). Yet, none of them call for a better and more reliable safety net to help hard-working families. Instead, their actions suggest that their philosophy is that every individual must fend for themselves and if they are worthy, someone will reach out to them, just like several people did to alleviate Sean's struggles in his adolescent years and, just like Leigh Anne's mother cared for the neighborhood children from broken homes.

This goes to show that the film fails to acknowledge the political nature of charity and its intricate connection to race and class, and this could explain why some critics have complained about the white savior narrative. Furthermore, race is also the elephant in the room in the film's treatment of Michael's adjustment at his new school. When Michael is accepted at Wingate Christian School he walks around among a student body almost entirely made up of white people; a point which is illustrated in the film when Michael writes his essay *White Walls*. What is not mentioned, however, is that the school the real-life Michael went to, was a direct result of white supremacy. In 1973, the Memphis school system was ordered to be desegregated by means

of busing (Tuohy et al 76). Most white people, including Leigh Anne's father, had "very strong ideas about race" and he pulled his children out of public school and enrolled them in the new Briarcrest Christian School (Tuohy et al 77). The Tuohys comment on the irony of the school admitting Michael three decades later in their book: "It's painful to say it, but Briarcrest was established as a direct result of racial fear and an almost wholesale unwillingness by Memphis whites to mingle their precious children with blacks. The irony was that a school that was set up specifically to oppose integration would one day welcome Michael Oher" (78).

Michael's presence would suggest that some progress has been made in the desegregation process, but at the same time the audience cannot help but notice that the students are still predominantly white. Again we can see the meme's link to the plantation narrative. After the school's coach becomes interested in Michael's athletic talent, he is admitted to the school on academic probation due to his lack of academic credentials after a long process where the school administrators are urged to admit him because it is "the right thing to do", while one might suspect that they probably would never even have considered his application had it not been for his unusual physique.

In fact, Michael's sports talent is another meme that has been replicated and changed. In the book, Lewis recounts several incidents where coaches and others are blown away by his "freakish physical skills" when he arrives at Briarcrest (76). In the film, however, he is portrayed as an extraordinarily strong giant who acts like a headless chicken on the football field. It is not until Leigh Anne learns that he has scored in the 90th percentile in protective instincts that she realizes how she can make him a football player. She teaches him to play football by explaining to him that he should pretend the team is his family and that it is his job to protect them. Similarly, seven-year-old Sean Junior teaches him football strategy at the dining room table, using ketchup bottles and other condiments. Burris sees this mutation in a racial context:

Instructed to imagine football as another place where he can protect his white benefactors, Michael begins to excel for the first time in his life. Significantly, while the real-life Oher gives credit to people in the Black community who volunteered their time to help him

learn to play sports from an early age, the film treats Michael's athleticism as something that did not take root until he came under the benevolent wing of the Tuohys. (30)

This can be said to be the result of the paternalistic relationship between the Tuohys and Michael. Like a benevolent master, the Tuohys train Michael in the skills he needs to be a useful family member. The sports training is just one element in his reeducation program to become a post-racial citizen according to Burris:

*The Blind Side* is not a story of how one of society's oppressed members can work to transform the people and institutions around him; rather, it is a story about how society can transform one of its oppressed members into an ideal, post-racial citizen. It is no coincidence, then, that Sandra Bullock was the only actor from the film to take home an Oscar. Her character's story is the one that matters most. For it is through Leigh Anne that the film suggests we have entered a post-racial era in which the barriers of Jim Crow have been effectively torn down, that existing structures of power have the ability to bring prosperity to society's downtrodden, and that the American Dream is equally available to all. (Burris 27-28)

Leigh Anne's prominent role in the film suggests that the film is mainly a vehicle for showcasing the benevolent nature of the Evangelical Christian Tuohy family. In order to achieve this, several memes had to be mutated and some omitted altogether. The Tuohys are overtly portrayed as religious in the film, for instance when they pray before dinner on Thanksgiving and when Leigh Anne tells one of the gangsters in Hurt Village that she is in a prayer group with the Memphis District Attorney; but their religiosity is also mentioned in the book a few times (Lewis 65; 68). However, changing the narrative in such a way so that the film is about Leigh Anne (and the family) and not about Michael can possibly be attributed to the book's non-religious author and the film's religious screenwriter/director. The mutated memes' relation to the plantation narrative suggests that the screenwriter sought to situate the film in a familiar and culturally sustainable context, while at the same time placing it within the contemporary post-racial progress trend. To make a film about one of society's downtrodden and to acknowledge who is responsible for his

situation, and to suggest that institutions need to change for the situation of African-Americans to improve, would probably be considered too progressive and leftist, even by Hollywood standards. This could have alienated the majority of Americans and significantly threatened the film's potential earnings.

### **4.3 Criteria of success**

#### **4.3.1 Critical success**

Previously, I have proposed two criteria of success in meme theory, namely critical success and financial success, whereby the film must fulfill one or both criteria to be a successful adaptation. In the following I will analyze whether the film meets these criteria, and I will start with the critical reception.

The main reason for considering the reception of professional critics is that “[m]ore than one-third of those living in the United States report seeking the advice of film critics, and approximately one-third of filmgoers say they choose films based on favorable reviews” (*Wall Street Journal* in Hughey 476). Research has shown that the reviews have a significant influence on box office revenue, and thus “critics play a dual role: reviewers both influence and predict box office revenue” (ibid.). This indicates that it is probably not possible to keep the two criteria of success separate, but instead we must investigate how they influence each other. The other reason, which is most significant in the case of *The Blind Side*, is that critics help viewers interpret films, and they thus either contribute to, ignore or justify the white savior narrative; or they address it and become part of the racial discourse. Either way, critics suggest how viewers should feel about social inequality and the traditional plantation narrative and the results are visible in the user reviews, as we shall see.

Metacritic.com is a website that collects both critic and user reviews of films and other media. As mentioned above, more than one third of American residents report seeking the advice of film critics, and thus sites such as Metacritic are often consulted to make decisions about which films



to watch. This means that they directly influence the potential income, even though there is not necessarily any correlation between the ‘metascore’ and the gross income of any given film. *The Blind Side* has a metascore of 53 out of 100 based on 29 critic reviews, with individual scores ranging from 0 to 80, of which 16 are defined as positive; 10 as mixed, and 3 as negative. Even though the majority of the reviews are positive, most of them give a score in the 60s and 70s.

The most celebratory review by a major newspaper was produced by Ann Hornaday of *The Washington Post*, who gave the film a score of 75 (the second highest) and writes that:

If viewers may experience a twinge of misgiving about the issues of race and class that are elided in “The Blind Side,” they can’t help but be enormously entertained and moved by its irresistible story. Especially in the film’s soaring, triumphant final moments, viewers get the sense that this isn’t a story about race or redemption or the complexities of class and culture. It’s a story about the authentic, compassionate response to vulnerability and need. It’s a story about family.

Paradoxically, *The Washington Post* is probably correct in saying that *The Blind Side* is not about race and class overtly, but it could be argued that it is covertly about race and class. Above, some scholars argued that the film illustrates the symptoms of social inequality in the United States today without explicitly addressing the cause. Hornaday simultaneously acknowledges that some viewers may notice this and feel uneasy about it, but she convinces the reader that this will soon be forgotten because “they can’t help but be enormously entertained and moved by its irresistible story.” This claim might be true for viewers who do not see race and class as an issue or more of an issue of the past. Some viewers, however, might feel that the portrayal of African-Americans as poor, self-destructive, drug-addicted gangsters is slightly stereotypical and a representation of the “post-racial” narrative, and might experience more than ‘a twinge of misgiving’.

Melissa Anderson of *The Village Voice* was one of those people, and awarded the film a score of zero (0) in her review titled “White People Do the Saving in The Blind Side.” She takes issue

with many aspects of the film, because, according to her "... [The] *Blind Side* the movie peddles the most insidious kind of racism, one in which whiteys are virtuous saviors, coming to the rescue of African-Americans who become superfluous in narratives that are supposed to be about them." The insidious character of the white savior narrative might be why this type of racism often escapes viewers' attention, and especially if they are brought up on Hollywood films that continue to contribute to this narrative, and rarely challenge it. After all, the film was a major box office hit and thus it is fair to assume that many, if not most, viewers did not notice or feel uneasy about Anderson's observation that:

In every scene, Oher is instructed, lectured, comforted, or petted like a big puppy; he is merely a cipher (Aaron has, at most, two pages of dialogue), the vehicle through which the kind-hearted but imperfect whites surrounding him are made saintlier. "Am I a good person?" Leigh Anne asks Sean non-rhetorically—as if every second in this film weren't devoted to canonizing her.

The reviewer does not find any mitigating circumstances in the treatment of Michael, and clearly sees the film as a typical white savior film, even though she does not use the term explicitly.

Shortly before Lewis's book was published, *The New York Times* published the excerpt *The Ballad of Big Mike*. Three years on they published the film review and described the film as "a live-action, reality-based version of a Disney cartoon: it's the heartwarming tale of a foundling taken in by strangers, who accept him even though he's different and treat him as one of their own." However, according to reviewer A. O. Scott, it differs from a Disney cartoon in its lack of conflict, excitement and danger. The film is given a score of 50 out of 100, indicating that there are some things left to be desired, and Scott regrets that:

Michael is a curiously blank character, his inner life lost in the glare of Leigh Anne's self-congratulation. His pre-Tuohy life is a flurry of flashbacks and vague stories meant — like that drug dealer and Michael's drug-addicted mother, who appears on screen briefly

— to conjure a world of violence, dysfunction and despair. “The Blind Side” is interested only in that world as an occasion for selective charity, and it is only slightly more interested in Michael’s inner life. He seems shy, grateful, sometimes sad and always, to Leigh Anne, an open book.

These observations are consistent with a white savior narrative where the white savior is the star of the story and the “foundling” is only a device to illustrate their benevolent nature. Just like the professional critics were divided on the qualities of the film, so were the viewers who wrote about the film online, but with the majority of the reviews situated at the upper end of the user review scale.

Metacritic collects user ratings using a ten-point scale. Unsurprisingly, given the financial success, the majority of the viewers are far less critical than the professional critics. Based on 287 ratings, 224 are positive; 27 mixed, and 36 negative, landing the film in the “generally favorable” category. Some reviews, both positive and negative, comment on the white savior criticism introduced by some professional critics. Among the positive reviews that comment on the white savior criticism, we find JohnH, who gives *The Blind Side* the top score of ten and says:

First, the criticisms of this movie are ridiculous. How this movie gets misconstrued as racism is crazy. The purpose of this movie is not to show white people as the saviors of black people, and any such suggestion is malicious, hateful, and racist. This movie gives nothing to complain about. It had plenty of laughs, a few tear-jerking moments, a quick-paced story that was engaging... All the elements necessary to keep most people entertained. Why do you think it did better in the box office in its second weekend? Because this movie is good. It achieves its goals effortlessly, and its goals are to show that people have the ability to drastically alter the course of each others’ lives through our actions. (metacritic.com)

This particular review is interesting because it turns racism on its head, compared to the common definition. According to JohnH, racism is not to support systems and institutions that maintain the social inequality between black and white people, and suggesting that the solution to black people's problems is not to improve their social mobility, but to be saved by wealthy white people. Instead, the user behind the review suggests that to insinuate that the film's purpose is to show white people as saviors of black people is malicious, hateful, and racist.

It is more than a little ironic that the last line of the review states that the film's "goals are to show that people have the ability to drastically alter the course of each others' lives through our actions" and thus indirectly stating that they do not have the ability to change their own lives. This implies that Michael's success depends on the intervention of benefactors, because being born into a gang-ridden housing project in the Memphis ghetto he simply does not have the opportunity to alter the course of his life through his own actions. Just like the film, JohnH does not acknowledge the political side of social inequality by asking questions such as: why is Hurt Village inhabited exclusively by poor African-Americans and why is the student body at Wingate Christian School almost exclusively white?

However, JohnH is not alone in denying the post-racial narrative as FoeXVII demonstrated by gifting the film with a score of 9 and writing: "If you fail to see that they're just human beings helping each other, you are the racist ones. The movie is worth watching, very inspirational and sad at times. And yeah, Sandra Bullock is outstanding." Further down the scale user reviews are slightly more nuanced. Heyitsmegrif4 gives the film a score of 5 and writes: "It falls for too many sport cliché's (sic) to actually be Oscar Nominee worthy and it is too sentimental, but Sandra Bullock gives a crowd pleasing performance. I give this movie 59% of a good movie." Like most of the reviews in the mixed category it does not mention the white savior criticism and instead focuses on common pitfalls. Similarly, Trev29 writes: "This movie is held on a level that I don't understand. Sandra was not brilliant and the movie lacks any creativity or originality in it. Contrived and predictable. This is just an ok cliché (sic) movie that is kind of boring." The score is set to 4.

What most reviewers have in common is their focus on Sandra Bullock's performance. The positive reviews mostly celebrate her, like we saw an example of above, and the mixed reviews are divided on the topic. In the negative reviews, many people found Bullock's character to be quite annoying, which seems to have been a deciding factor when they gave the film scores of 1 to 3. The user G\_Thomas\_Boston goes into great detail to explain why he was not entertained by Bullock's character:

When I heard all the buzz about Sandra Bullock's performance in *The Blind Side*, I decided that I just had to rent the DVD. When I heard all the buzz about papaya, I decided that I just had to try some. Both decisions left a bad taste in my mouth.

Bullock plays Leigh Anne Tuohy, a plucky gun-wielding mom with a lot of spunk ... One day, Leigh Anne notices a behemoth named Michael Oher (played well by Quinton Aaron) walking around shivering and homeless. She invites him to stay overnight in her upscale home.

Now, I don't know about most guys, but if some rich woman that looked like Sandra Bullock invited me to stay overnight in her home, I'd be there faster than a Viagra-laden Superman flying to his date with Lois Lane. However, after a few minutes of listening to Tuohy's junior-high psychology as well as enduring her general all-around annoying personality, I'd be out of there faster than Sarah Palin's ouster from a Mensa meeting.

Then there's Bullock's performance itself. I don't know if it suffered from the fact that she was portraying such an irritating person. I was hoping some hulk from the football team would mistake her for a blocking sled and... well, not really. But maybe the fact that the character got under my skin so much says something about Bullock's acting. ... (metacritic.com)

With such an eye for detail, it is perhaps surprising that the user did not comment on the relationship between Leigh Anne and Michael, but if these reviews illustrate anything, it is that

viewers experience the same film very differently. However, Sandra Bullock's performance was not the only factor earning the film a negative score. killdarren gives the film a 0 score and writes: "This movie is despicable. Sandra Bullock as the great white hope. Who comes along and 'helps' a black kid to feel better about herself and brag to her neighbors. Offensive, outrageous, racist, dumb, pathetic. The people making this movie have no idea what it means to truly help someone." Although less eloquent, this review comes close to the professional review in *The Village Voice* in sentiment. Fortunately, even among users, some take the time to review in more detail, such as Myffubs, who is slightly more generous with a score of 3, but sees the portrayal of African-Americans as problematic:

Upon seeing the trailer for *The Blind Side*, I had a good idea how I would react. Upon viewing the final product, my suspicions were validated. Its heart is entirely in the wrong place. The movie ought to be about Michael Oher and how he achieved success, but this is not the case. *The Blind Side* centers around the kind Southern white woman who takes in an underprivileged black youth. Her kindness, not his struggle, is what the movie is about. To the actors' credit, everyone does a good job. The leads are mostly great, especially Quinton Aaron, but the direction and writing undercuts the performances. *The Blind Side* is all uplift and no substance. When the movie isn't trying to win your heart with its blatant emotional pandering, it's trying to warm it with sentiment-heavy and sitcom-lite humor, a rather nauseating combination. Also problematic is the unflattering portrait of African-Americans. In the movie's eyes, if black people aren't waiting for kind white folk to lend a helping hand, they are either unable to support their families or are manipulative bullies. I suppose there is one business-professional African-American woman, but it's telling that she is introduced as a villain. There are moments in *The Blind Side* where a better movie shines through, one with both the appropriate seriousness and sweetness for the situation, but this better movie is largely overshadowed by the mediocre one in the foreground. It is sadly telling about the state of film when movies like this are nominated for Best Picture. (metacritic.com)

This user review nicely sums up several of the points in both the mixed and the negative critic reviews: Oher is perceived as a vehicle to make the Tuohys seem saintlier; the portrayal of African-Americans is problematic or racist; it is all uplift, and lacks conflict or excitement; and finally, Oher is a blank character who is outshined by Leigh Anne's self-congratulation. However, the reviews in those categories are far outnumbered by the positive reviews by both critics and users, and that is not at all surprising when we look at the box office revenue. It is also worth noting that even the negative user reviewers had seen the film and thus contributed to the revenue.

#### **4.3.2 Financial success**

As mentioned in the previous chapter, where I provided a detailed assessment of the financial success, *The Blind Side* had a budget of \$30 million and it grossed more than the whole budget in the opening weekend alone with a total of \$34,119,328. The total domestic gross amounted to \$255,959,000 and the worldwide gross came in at \$307,459,000 (pro.boxoffice.com).

These numbers speak for themselves; the film was undoubtedly a great financial success. It is probable that some of the financial success can be attributed to the favorable reviews by both critics and viewers, not to mention the niche marketing. The Oscar attention might also have been a factor in the film's success.

#### **4.4 Concluding remarks**

So far, the case study of *The Blind Side* has indicated that both Simone Murray's cultural economy theory and Linda Hutcheon's meme theory are applicable for studying the adaptation process and product, even though they both have their limitations. Murray's original proposal for cultural economy theory is too literary bestseller-specific, and I have therefore proposed a simplified and more general model, which aims at theorizing all adaptation processes involving literature and films. Unfortunately, the appropriated model is not applicable to adaptations not

involving literature and films; however, it might be possible to develop the model further to create a more general model, if this is deemed favorable.

Meme theory has not adopted a specific methodology to date, but instead consists of a few basic tenets adapted from gene theory and the theory of evolution by natural selection. Based on these tenets I have tried to analyze *The Blind Side*, to investigate whether meme theory is applicable in adaptation studies, and the results indicate that this is the case. Like cultural economy theory, meme theory is only applicable to theorizing certain aspects of the adaptation process and product, and for this reason they can be applicable both separately and together, depending on the focus of the analysis.

Despite their differences, they also overlap to an extent, particularly in regard to the criteria of a successful adaptation. In stark contrast to the traditional focus on fidelity to the source text and adherence to medium specificity, the theories proposed here suggest criteria that measure critical and financial success. This is one aspect that makes the theories particularly suitable to be fused into a wider framework that considers both the cultural economy and the evolution of stories in a cultural context.

However, even this fusion neglects theorizing the interplay that occurs when a film adaptation based on literary sources is adapted again into new literary adaptations, where the film adaptation is also a source, as is the case for *The Blind Side*. Both theories are open to incorporating theories that explain this process and how the other adaptations or sources are affected by this, but none of them have explicitly attempted to theorize this to date. For this reason I will explore three new perspectives that attempt to achieve this, and investigate whether one or more can be incorporated into the new framework.



## 5 Potential Gaps in the Framework

### 5.1 Background

The application of the new framework has so far focused primarily on the transferring process between the originating sources and the film adaptation. However, as previously mentioned, in addition to the film, *The Blind Side* story is, to date, told in two preceding texts by Michael Lewis and two succeeding texts, one by Michael Oher himself with the help of Don Yeager, and the other by Leigh Anne and Sean Tuohy with Sally Jenkins, and with interludes by Tim McGraw, Sandra Bullock, Collins Tuohy, Michael Oher and Sean Junior Tuohy. The timeline of the published retellings of Michael Oher's life is as follows:

**September 2006:** *The Ballad of Big Mike* (excerpt adapted from book) by Michael Lewis, published in *The New York Times*.

**September 2006:** *The Blind Side: Evolution of a Game* (book) by Michael Lewis (later released in paperback and as a Movie Tie-In edition).

**November 2009:** *The Blind Side* (film) adapted and directed by John Lee Hancock.

**July 2010:** *In a Heartbeat: Sharing the Power of Cheerful Giving* (book) by Leigh Anne and Sean Tuohy with Sally Jenkins.

**February 2011:** *I Beat the Odds: From Homelessness, to The Blind Side, and Beyond* (book) by Michael Oher with Don Yaeger.

The list shows that all five versions were published within a five-year period. Previously it has been suggested that stories are adapted to fit new cultural and economic contexts, but it is doubtful whether this alone can account for the speed at which these versions were adapted. In the introduction, I discussed whether it is possible to find a theory that can explain why the same stories are adapted multiple times, and we saw that meme theory and cultural economy theory suggest that it is possible, but the explanations they provide so far may not be exhaustive.

Up until this point, the foci of the analyses have centered on the transferring process from book to film to limit the scope of the analyses and enhance clarity. However, it is questionable whether the results provide all the theory needed to understand how one ought to study adaptations. In those cases where several versions of the same story exist, as is the case for *The Blind Side*, the need to understand why the same story has been adapted multiple times, and how the different versions influence each other, arises. The relationship later versions have to earlier versions suggests that they are connected, and would most probably not have been adapted if not for the need to position themselves in relation to other versions. The key to understanding adaptations may lie in the question of motivation and intentionality. Despite resistance towards authors' intentions in literary criticism, it might be impossible to fully grasp why adaptations are made unless one considers intentionality in the creative process of adapting stories. It may be part of the explanation of why stories are replicated and changed over and over again.

In the following, three different perspectives in regard to the relationship between versions of a story will be discussed. The three perspectives are represented by Jørgen Bruhn's dialogic process; John Bryant's fluid text analysis; and Linda Hutcheon's intentionality view. The objective is to explore how to best understand the relationship between versions, and why the same stories are adapted in different versions. Additionally, the discussion will aim to understand how the relationships affect the interpretation of the different versions and what implications this has for how adaptations ought to be studied. Lastly, I will investigate whether it is possible or desirable to incorporate parts of these perspectives into the new framework.

## **5.2 Bruhn's dialogic perspective**

In his essay *Dialogizing adaptation studies: From one-way transport to a dialogic two-way process*, Jørgen Bruhn suggests that adaptation studies should "try to describe, analyse and interpret the inherent meaning in *the process of adapting*. Adaptation (be it from novel to film or between other media) ought to be regarded as a two-way process instead of a form of one-way transport" (73). The traditional focus has been on the changes that occur in the adaptation and

how and why it differs from the source, but Bruhn reminds us that an adaptation also changes the original text itself in the following ways:

*Editorial/authorial changes in the paratext* (following G. Genette's terminology): the well-known changes in cover, blurbs and other strategies often subsumed under the disclaimer 'Now a major motion picture'.

*Changes in readers' reception*: this is a very large category including 'popular' readers acknowledging new aspects to an otherwise well-known text after an adaptation; expert/professional readers' discussions of adaptations as 'interpretations' of a work; changes in hierarchical position according to canon-formation or age-differentiation (a children's book being transformed into a grown up text, for instance). (Bruhn 73)

Bruhn finds that this is an undervalued aspect of the adaptation process, and suggests that one should replace the "exaggerated goal-orientedness" with studying "both the source and the result of the adaptation as two texts, infinitely changing positions, taking turns being sources for each other in the ongoing work of the reception in the adaptational process" (ibid.). Bruhn acknowledges that he is not the first to think in dialogic terms, but seeks to be a part of what he calls an 'intertextual turn' within adaptation studies which will widen "the idea of a one-to-one relation in adaptations" (75). As he notes himself towards the end of the essay, this methodology has much in common with the concept of intertextuality discussed by Stam and Leitch, among others, but he claims to go further in an attempt to dialogize adaptation studies (Bruhn 83).

The methodology proposed by Bruhn, where the creation of meaning is seen as a back-and-forth movement where source(s) and adaptation(s) take turns influencing each other in an infinite process is suggestive in terms of understanding the relationships between versions of a story and how readers and audiences can interpret them. However, it does not explain why adaptations are made, and it does not pretend to do so either. Nonetheless, the methodology might prove useful in the development of the theories discussed in this thesis, as it could easily be incorporated into meme theory or a new hybrid theory of meme theory and cultural economy theory.

To assess whether Bruhn's dialogic perspective is applicable I would like to apply it to a sample from *The Blind Side*. In the analysis, I will use the already mentioned story about Michael's striped rugby short, which he bought when Leigh Anne took him shopping because he was wearing shorts in winter. On the shopping trip, they face major difficulties finding clothes that fit him because of his unusual height and size. Eventually, Michael finds a few items he likes and Lewis recounts the event this way:

She pulled down the absolute biggest shirt she could find.

"I think that's okay," he said, at length. For him it counted as a soliloquy.

"No! Not okay! You need to love it! If you don't love it in the store you'll never wear it once you get home. The store is where you like it best."

She pulled down a gargantuan brown and yellow Rugby shirt.

"I like that one," he said. (70)

The next time we hear about the brown and yellow rugby shirt, approximately eight months have passed in the narrative. Lewis writes:

He still exhibited an odd tendency to show up at school in the same clothes every day, but now they were different clothes: long pants and the brown and yellow Rugby shirt Leigh Anne had bought for him. That shirt became so worn that Leigh Anne, the fiftieth time she saw him in it, threatened to rip it off his back. (83)

In the film, the shopping spree has been significantly adapted to the new narrative structure. After being told that even in the *Big and Tall* shop, there is only a small section of clothes that will fit Michael, Leigh Anne looks around and says: "see anything you like?" Michael wears an expression of discomfort and lightly shakes his head, without saying anything. In fact, he has no lines at all during this scene. Leigh Anne goes on: "well, one thing I know about shopping is that if you do not absolutely love it, you won't wear it. Store's where you like it the best. So before

you choose something, think of yourself wearing it. Say to yourself: ‘Is this me?’” She then proceeds to suggest a couple of shirts, but Michael only shakes his head with a blank expression. After being instructed to go looking in a specific area of the store, he quickly finds a shirt he likes, and he holds it up to Leigh Anne, but the shirt is not visible to the viewer. She looks disapprovingly at the shirt and says: “That’s the one. That’s the one you like?” Michael smiles back and she replies: “Well, all right then.”

In the scene that follows, we see Leigh Anne pulling up to Wingate Christian School and we then see Michael and Sean Junior walking towards the entrance. Michael is wearing a brightly colored yellow and brown *striped* rugby shirt, and the editing insinuates that this is the shirt he just picked out in the previous scene. The contrast from what he was wearing before and the stereotype of the gangsters living in Hurt Village, which has already been established in the film, makes his new look appear comical. In the following scenes, Michael is seen wearing several different-colored striped rugby shirts. In a later scene in the school’s cafeteria, Michael is walking towards Sean Junior with a lunch tray, wearing a black and yellow striped rugby shirt, and as he sits down, Sean Junior says: “Enough with the rugby shirts! You look like a giant bumblebee.” Michael looks down at his shirt with an expression of surprise, but as usual, says nothing.

To analyze this example according to the dialogic perspective proposed by Bruhn, I wish to first look at what this episode expresses in the book for a reader who is not familiar with any of the adaptations. Lewis’ retelling of this incident, which was probably told to him by the Tuohys, connotes a 16-year-old, young man who lacks parents who can buy him clothes, and in addition to this sensitive subject, he is so large that it is also difficult for him to find clothes that fit. Most teenagers are very self-conscious about their size and these two aspects likely make this shopping trip, initiated by a person he hardly knows, even more stressful for an already uncomfortable teenager. The book explains that Michael bought several items that day, one of which was a brown and yellow rugby shirt that Leigh Anne pulled for him. Note that it does not mention what pattern the colors were.

In the film, however, such details cannot be omitted and the adapter must make a decision about what the shirt in question looks like. In the store scene, Michael picks out the shirt he likes himself and shows it to Leigh Anne, but the shirt is outside the shot, and the viewer can guess from Leigh Anne's incredulous look that it must be bizarre in some respect. In the next scene the design of the shirt is revealed, and the viewer can smirk or laugh out loud at the shirt, which when worn by a large boy makes him resemble an enormous bumblebee, which is probably the intended response. There is a risk that not all viewers will interpret the shirt this way, so the adapter has accounted for this by featuring a similar shirt in a later scene, where Sean Junior points out that the shirt makes Michael look like a giant bumblebee; thus enabling the viewer to laugh at this quip and reflect that this boy who is no good at school, and who is not performing in the football field, has no understanding of appropriate clothing for his size either.

For a person who reads the book after watching the film, it is almost inevitable that he or she will picture Michael in a striped brown and yellow shirt in the shopping scene and thus have an altogether different perception of the event than a reader who has not seen the film. When the book functioned as a source for the film, the adapter saw an opportunity for comic relief instead of problematizing Michael's difficult situation; and, when the film functions as a source for the book, the seriousness of the reason they are shopping for clothes in the first place might be forgotten because of the image of the giant bumblebee.

However, this reading is further complicated by the other two sources available. In his memoir, Michael Oher himself remembers the shopping trip in this way:

. . . Coach Tuohy's wife, Leigh Anne, loaded me up in her car and we headed to a big and tall men's shop I knew of on my end of town. She still teases me about all the striped rugby shirts I picked out, and that scene made it into the movie. But what the film doesn't show is the hideous shirt covered in flowers and palm leaves that she pulled for me to try on. It looked like something an old man would wear on the beach in Hawaii. It was truly ugly! I passed on that. (136)

Oher's recollection tells us at least two things: One is that he did in fact pick out several striped rugby shirts, as is shown in the film, but since this information is not given in the source text, the adapter must have had other sources, namely the Tuohys or Oher himself. The second thing is that the disbelief of the other's taste was mutual, but in the film Leigh Anne is the alibi of good taste and Michael the confused teenager who has no fashion sense, which is an interesting mutation. For a second opinion on what really happened, one could look in the Tuohys' book, but interestingly, the shirt business is not mentioned at all. This is all the Tuohys say about the shopping trip:

The next day, as Michael climbed into the car after basketball practice, Leigh Anne began to grapple with the scale of his potential needs. For starters, he was such a big kid that she had no idea where to look for sizes that would fit him. Surveying him, she said, "Okay. Where are we going? Do you know where we would get you some clothes?"

Michael looked back at her with an impatient, adolescent expression, like she'd just said something stupid. He sort of snorted, "Yeahhh."

"Well, I certainly can't take you to Macy's," she shot back, "so point me in the right direction." (11-12)

The Tuohys express an atmosphere that is completely different from the other versions. In their recollection, Michael was confident, almost cocky, when taken shopping, which is in stark contrast to his behavior in the film, and the other versions. This indicates that the different versions influence each other and the reader's perception is altered when he or she has read one or more of the adaptations. And it also shows that the longer the adaptation history is, the more complex the interpretation becomes. In light of these findings, Bruhn's dialogic perspective, where versions take turns being sources for each other, has proved to be helpful in understanding the relationship between the versions in the adaptation history of *The Blind Side*. However, it is not the only valid perspective in this regard.

### 5.3 Bryant's fluid text analysis

In the introduction to the essay *Textual identity and adaptive revision: Editing adaptation as a fluid text*, John Bryant writes: "Adaptation is creativity's stepchild, always vying for validation, never catching up to its originating source" (47). Bryant, who proposes to include all forms of revision in the creative process, challenges this traditional view of adaptation as the opposite of creativity; likewise he extends the notion of a work to be the sum of all its versions (ibid.). As the title of the essay suggests, Bryant sees adaptation as a *fluid text*, a concept he explains thus:

A fluid text is any work that exists in multiple versions in which the primary cause of these versions is some form of revision. Revisions may be performed by originating writers, by their editors or publishers, or by readers and audiences, who reshape the originating work to reflect their own desires for the text, themselves, their culture. (48)

The definition indicates that the concept of fluid text can be fruitful in understanding the relationship between versions, and interestingly it also says something about why revisions are performed, which was not sufficiently accounted for by Bruhn's dialogic perspective. Bryant defines adaptation as "announced retelling of an originating text" and makes a distinction between 'announced adaptation' and 'adaptive revision,' the latter being adaptation in an intertextual way, where versions reference other versions (ibid.). He continues by defining the meaning of any adaptation as "essentially a measuring of the critical distances between and among adaptive versions" and he also claims that "[w]hile versions are necessarily interconnected, they possess distinct textual identities. The *ethics* of adaptation is knowing and acknowledging the boundaries of textual identity" (Bryant 49).

It is important to note that Bryant talks of classic fictional works such as *Moby-Dick*, which is his example, and that his definitions may not be fully suited to explain the relationship between versions of accounts of real-life events. This is demonstrated in his call to expand the practice of scholarly editing: "Rather than retrieving and preserving the author's 'intended text' of a work as a textual object, fluid text editing attempts to trace the phenomenon of textual evolution by



focusing on the text as a dynamic process that charts the changing textual identities of originating version, authorial revisions and adaptive revisions” (Bryant 51).

In the case of *The Blind Side* the successive versions are arguably adaptive revisions, but it is unclear whether they count as announced retellings. The problem of any retelling of real-life events is that the originating work is not necessarily the version with the most authority. Bryant stresses that the worry about being true to the original is a false concern, because “adaptation has the entirely different agenda of revising the original, for whatever social or aesthetic end, through a re-performance or re-writing of it, in order to reposition the originating text in a new cultural context” (54-55). This is especially salient when the story told is based on real events and the question of intentionality arises. The Tuohys explain at length why they chose to write a book about how they perceived the story of Michael Oher. In the prologue to *In a Heartbeat: Sharing the Power of Cheerful Giving* they write:

If you are among the millions of people who saw the movie *The Blind Side*, or read the book it was based on, then you know what happened [after we met Michael Oher] . . . You probably think you know everything about us, our whole story. Actually, you only know part of it. Don’t get us wrong. Our friend Michael Lewis, the author of *The Blind Side*, wrote a wonderful book that deserves to be a bestseller. (Most of his books sell big. We haven’t read all of them, but if you see him, tell him we did.) Our friend Sandra Bullock is a brilliant actress and her star turn in the movie, all nerve and bluntness, was perfect. (Leigh Anne doesn’t actually wear skirts that tight, but it’s a minor point.) Compared to our real lives, though, the book and movie were just sketches. . . . The truth is, childbirth is easier to explain than our story. So in this book we’d like to introduce our family properly, tell you how we saw events through our own eyes, and deliver our message in our own voice. (Tuohy et al 3-4)

The reason behind the adaptive revision is a clear desire to tell the story in a way that is in accordance with their personal view of what happened. Judging from the prologue, this is their main objective with the book. Their secondary objectives are to share their religious beliefs in

regard to charity, and possibly to make money from book sales. These objectives differ in some respects to the originating works by Michael Lewis, who was not a part of the story himself, despite his intimate relationship with the family, and his intentions with the book can be said to have been in accordance with his profession as a sports writer, both artistically and financially. In other words the two texts have distinct textual identities, but they are still connected to each other. This is an important point in the notion of fluid text, and concerns the necessity to rid the debate of any reference to fidelity. Bryant explains: “A fluid text approach detaches itself from the retrospective anxieties that derive from a false sense of originality and respects the textual identities of both adaptation and original, but does so primarily to sharpen the focus on the differences between the identities and how one textual identity may be seen to evolve into the other” (55).

This evolution is particularly evident in Michael Oher’s book *I Beat the Odds: From Homelessness, to The Blind Side, and Beyond*, as he overtly discusses what makes his book different from the others. In the prologue he says:

I didn’t write this book just to revisit Michael Lewis’s *The Blind Side: Evolution of a Game*, and it is not meant to be a repeat of Sean and Leigh Anne Tuohy’s book *In a Heartbeat: Sharing the Power of Cheerful Giving* (which was released while I was working on this one). Lewis’s book was originally aimed at football fans who were interested in some game strategy and a personal story about it; the Tuohys’ book was designed to help carry on a discussion with people who had seen the movie about our lives and were inspired to find their own way to give.

My book is as different from the other two as they are different from each other, and I have a couple of goals that I’d like to accomplish with it. The first is that I want to help separate fact from fiction. After the movie came out, there were a lot of people asking me if my life was exactly how it was shown on screen. Obviously, the moviemakers have to make artistic choices to tell the story in the best way, but some of the details, like me having to learn the game of football as a teenager or me walking to the gym in November wearing cut-off shorts, just aren’t true. Since so many people seem

interested in details, I hope that I can help to make a little more sense out of it all for them.

My second goal with this book, and the much more important one, is that I want to talk about – and to – the nearly 500,000 children in America whose lives have been so rough that the state has determined they're better off being cared for by someone other than their parents. . . . But the one thing I particularly want to stress is that I was determined to make something of myself, and that's the hope I want to offer to those children and teens, and the adults in their lives who want to help them. This book is designed to tell my story while explaining the lessons I learned along the way and looking at the mind-set I had to succeed, with or without anyone else's help.

I've read some newspaper articles recently where Leigh Anne Tuohy is quoted as saying that I would either be dead from a shooting or the bodyguard to some gang leader if I hadn't been taken in by their family. I think that had to be a misquote because despite the sensationalist things that make for a more dramatic story, what my family knows and what I know is that I would have found my way out of the ghetto one way or another. Failure was not an option for me. (Oher xv-xvii)

Oher clearly positions his book in relation to the other books, indicating both the similarities and the differences between them. His intentions with the book are similar to the Tuohys' book in that he also wants to set the record straight on *what really happened*, and he may also have a financial motivation. Yet, he clearly positions his retelling in opposition to Leigh Anne's version by commenting on her interpretation of his potential for success in life without the Tuohys' intervention. He backs this up by telling the story of his life before the Tuohys, which is only fragmentarily referred to in Lewis' book and hardly mentioned in the Tuohy version. This distancing strategy is key to the book's status as a version of Lewis' book in the context of fluid text theory, which is concerned with how to identify a version, because it simultaneously measures the distance between versions. Bryant argues that:

If written works can be known by their rhetorical strategies, then versions, like any written work, can be similarly defined, with the added understanding that the act of

revision, which generates the version, is itself a rhetorical strategy. We know a version, then, not only by its revisions, but also by its revision strategy. A revision strategy may be defined as a set of textual changes designed to have a rhetorical effect that is meaningfully distinct, or distant, from its original. Indeed, I would say that if a revised text reveals to us no revision strategy, it is probably not a version in its own right, but rather the product of a kind of tactical tinkering. Put another way, for a version to have its own textual identity, its revision strategy must create a theorizable distance from its predecessor. (63)

Looking at the texts that have been defined as versions of the original, understood as Michael Lewis' *The Blind Side: Evolution of a Game*, using Bryant's definition of version, both texts that succeed the original text have distinct revision strategies, as we have seen, but almost more important than their distance to the original text, is their distance to the film (understood as a text) based on the original.

One obstacle is how *The Ballad of Big Mike* should be understood in this paradigm. It was published before the original, but is also an excerpt of it. Using Bryant's terms it could arguably be defined as an authorial revision, but this is not clear. Based on the current understanding of fluid text it is hard to determine whether a text that predates the original can be called an adaptation, however, the text's dependency on the original, as it was most probably conceived after the production of the original, is also a factor. Precisely because Bryant has developed his fluid text theory based on fictional classical literature, it is sometimes an imperfect fit when applying it to a work based on real-life events involving real persons' perspectives. Nonetheless, it provides a fruitful input to understanding how to assess the meaning in the creative process of making adaptations.

#### **5.4 Hutcheon's intentionality in adaptation**

In her book *A Theory of Adaptation*, Linda Hutcheon demonstrates that adapters interpret stories they adapt in line with on their own abilities and interests, as well as the political climate at the time of production, and thus adaptations of the same source text can have completely different

themes. This suggests that the motives for choosing to adapt a certain story varies greatly, but for some reason this has been undervalued in adaptation studies. Hutcheon discusses why there has been reluctance to address why adapters adapt stories and why they adapt them the way they do:

[I]n academic literary circles, we stopped talking about these dimensions of the creative process some time in the twentieth century. In fact, the very idea of dealing with the creative process began to sound dated in North America shortly after W.K. Wimsatt and Monroe Beardsley's 1946 condemnation of the "intentional fallacy." A few decades later, Roland Barthes effectively entombed intentionality in his famous essay, "The Death of the Author," and Michel Foucault danced on its grave when he shifted critical attention to the anonymity of discourse, making the position of the "author," in his terms, "a particular vacant space that may in fact be filled with different individuals". (106)

In other words, they argued that the author's intention is unavailable to the reader, and also irrelevant to creating meaning and value in a work of art. However, since then these claims have been met with some criticism and Hutcheon contends that the adapters' intentions "are potentially relevant to the audience's interpretation" and the intentions are not unavailable, but often visible in the text (107). Still, clearly the audience can never know for sure if the interpretation is in accordance with the adapters' intentions, and Hutcheon is aware that what she is proposing "may at first appear to be a step backward," however, she states that "adaptation teaches that if we cannot talk about the creative process, we cannot fully understand the urge to adapt and therefore perhaps the very process of adaptation. We need to know 'why'" (ibid.). She brings to attention the fact that in other disciplines, such as law, intention is a factor in determining the charge, but in the arts "attention even to this kind of intent is in effect outlawed, for, it has been argued, considering the artist's life or intentions reduces literature to autobiography and reading to voyeurism" (Hutcheon 108).

As discussed in the theory chapter, adaptation studies needs to divert its attention from the fidelity debate and instead develop a theory about why adaptations are made and how they ought to be studied. Just as Hutcheon points out, we need to know why adaptations are made to

understand the creative process, because failing to do so means that we cannot fully understand the very process of adaptation. In regard to this, intentionality seems to occupy an important role. Hutcheon gives examples of how the creator's intentions influences the audience's interpretation, because they, just like the adapter, interpret in a context, but stresses that we "should never reduce the explanation of a work to only that aspect" (109-110).

Returning to *The Blind Side*, it is by now indisputable that the different adapters of Michael Oher's story had distinct intentions with their adaptations or versions. Screenwriter and director John Lee Hancock's intentions have been discussed in earlier chapters in the contexts of cultural economy theory and meme theory, and it was suggested that the aim of the film was to appeal to a diverse range of audiences and that artistic choices were made in accordance with current narratives in American society and culture. Together with the intentions indicated by the Tuohys and Michael Oher, this suggests that all adapters are influenced by their intentions for adapting a particular work, and the implications are that this aspect ought to be a part of the new framework for it to fully explain why adaptations are made and how we ought to study them.

### **5.5 Incorporating the perspectives into the new framework**

As has been repeated several times, meme theory and cultural economy theory suggest that adaptations are made with the aim of becoming financial and/or critical successes. While this is likely true, it is probably not the whole truth. The discussion of how to understand the relationship between versions has demonstrated that adaptations are most likely also a product of the adapter's intentions, whether it is to retell a story in what the adapter deems a "better" way or as an attempt to put forward a different perspective and to distance the adaptation from other adaptations. These intentions have implications for the audience's interpretation of the versions. Bruhn and Bryant focus on the relationship between versions and Bryant stresses that "critically speaking, the focus of fluid text analysis cannot be on single versions, but rather on how to measure the critical distances between versions and on what is the meaning inherent in that distancing" (54). This means that the traditional focus on the one-way analysis of the transferring process from, for instance, novel to film must be abandoned if such a methodology is to be adopted.

Without doubt, a person who reads Michael Oher's book after having watched the film will interpret the film in a different way after the reading, since the book provides significant information about Oher's early life and many more details about his relationship to the Tuohys. Likewise, watching the film after reading Michael Lewis' book will probably change the reader's perception of the book, as the film gives many of the characters a face, a body, and a voice, and it also features scenes that are not in the book. This is not unique to adaptations based on true stories: one distinct advantage of this perspective on versions is that it is applicable to several types of adaptations.

Neither meme theory nor cultural economy theory take this into account, as they focus primarily on the evolution of memes and the industry mechanisms that influence the adaptation process. However, if adaptation studies is to move from the dominant focus on from original to adaptation to broader theories, it must begin to look at the bigger picture. In cases where a work includes several versions, it is inherently problematic to analyze each version as an independent adaptation.

All the scholars discussed above bring valuable contributions to the table in terms of proposing how one can study different versions. While they share certain similarities, they also have distinct foci. As discussed above, all three perspectives contribute to theorizing some aspects of why adaptations are made, but Bruhn and Bryant's perspectives can only be generalized to fit all adaptations with some difficulty. Yet, the examples above indicate that it is achievable to develop a theory that incorporates Bruhn's perspective on versions as a dialogic back-and-forth movement, together with Bryant's fluid text analysis, which traces textual evolution and rejects the hierarchy of original and derivative versions; and lastly, Hutcheon's perspective on intentionality in adaptation provides a plausible explanation of why adaptations are made.

This theory could, together with a hybrid theory of meme theory and cultural economy theory form the outline of a comprehensive theory going forward in adaptation studies. However, if

history is anything to judge by, the likelihood of the field as a whole adopting a common foundation on which to stand is minimal. Nonetheless, the results are valuable in their own right, despite their limitations, providing new insights in the field of adaptation studies. Perhaps most important is the contribution of discussing the application of theories. If adaptation scholars should come to some sort of agreement, the direction that is ultimately chosen, may decide the future of adaptation studies for a long time to come.



## 6 Conclusion

In conclusion, this thesis has shown that the new framework, consisting of cultural economy theory and meme theory, is applicable as evidenced by the case study of *The Blind Side*. And it follows from this that it is possible to find a theory or more that can explain why adaptations are made and how they ought to be studied. The theories studied here indicate that there might not be one single theory that accounts for all the reasons adaptations are made, but that fusing theories, such as Simone Murray's cultural economy theory and Linda Hutcheon's meme theory, gives a broad and nuanced set of reasons for performing adaptations. The theories that have been analyzed in this thesis also provide some suggestions for how adaptations ought to be studied, and additional perspectives proposed by Jørgen Bruhn, John Bryant and Linda Hutcheon supplement them well.

Both theories discussed here rest on the premise that adaptations are made with the aim of becoming financial and/or critical successes, but apart from this they are significantly different. Cultural economy theory divides the adaptation process into stages where different agents perform different tasks and influence the adaptation in their distinct ways. Murray's proposed adaptation circuit places an emphasis on the publishing industry, including the role of book fairs and literary prize-judging committees. I have found, however, that this makes the methodology too specific, as it only applies to film adaptations that have been adapted from literary bestsellers. For cultural economy theory to explain all book to film adaptations it must remove the agents involved in selling film-rights at film festivals and literary prize committees. I have therefore proposed a simplified and more general model with the following agents: authors; agents; publishers; screenwriters; and producers and distributors. The model visualizes the agents in a circular movement, inspired by Robert Darnton's communications circuit.

The main issue with the proposed model based on cultural economy theory is that it is still too specific; in other words, it only explains the process of book to film adaptations and not all the other media types, which also undergo adaptations. However, this issue could be overcome either

by fashioning models with the appropriate agents for each type of adaptation, or by designing a model that is so general that it works on all types of adaptations. It is doubtful whether the last option is a good idea, since the greatest advantage of the proposed model is its specificity. If the agents are replaced by more general concepts, it falls to each analysis to define the agents' tasks and their significance in the process. However, replacing the model with a more general model cannot be ruled out at this point.

In contrast to cultural economy theory's specificity, meme theory is so general that it is not associated with any methodology or model to date. Due to this status, the aim of this thesis has been to investigate whether the main tenet of meme theory can be applied to an analysis of a book to film adaptation. The empirical data of the theory is primarily Linda Hutcheon's brief proposal in her book *A Theory of Adaptation*, which has been appropriated from Richard Dawkins original work on meme theory in the book *The Selfish Gene* in 1976. Because so little work has been done on meme theory in relation to adaptation studies, it has been necessary to appropriate the original tenet of meme theory, which dealt with cultural ideas, and also define story units that make up adaptations as memes. In so doing, the main tenet of meme theory in relation to adaptation studies states that memes survive through a mutational process of replication and change. On this basis, the analysis has attempted to map representative examples of memes in the source text and in the film adaptation, and to investigate which memes were kept or omitted, and which memes survived by means of mutation. Furthermore, there has been an attempt at understanding why some memes survive and others do not. It has been suggested that the survival value of memes is linked to the memes' fit in new cultural contexts. This is the analogy to natural selection. Memes that fit the new cultural context are replicated and memes that do not fit are omitted, and some memes are replicated and changed; in other words, adapted to fit the new surroundings.

The analogy to genes is not perfect: genes are not purpose-driven and neither are memes themselves, but the people behind the adaptations make the decisions regarding which memes survive and which do not, and the purpose is always to make a product that is a critical and/or financial success, so in that sense memes are driven by a purpose.

The objective of this thesis has been to investigate whether Murray's cultural economy theory and Hutcheon's meme theory can be fused into an integrated framework that successfully explains why adaptations are made and how they ought to be studied. More specifically, it has been assumed that they will form a framework that explains that adaptations are made partly for economic reasons dictated by cultural economy, and partly because of the human need for retelling stories that fit ever-changing cultural and economic contexts. As anticipated, the results of the analysis have been in accordance with the assumption.

The conclusion stated above is supported by the findings in the case study of the film adaptation of *The Blind Side*. In the case study, I first traced the sources of the film, and then proceeded to analyze the adaptation process in accordance with the proposed methodology of cultural economy theory and meme theory. For reasons of clarity, cultural economy theory was treated separately from meme theory, although the two must be seen as an integrated framework. The theories overlap to some extent, and for this reason I chose to analyze the financial success of *The Blind Side* in the chapter regarding cultural economy theory, because this theory is primarily concerned with the economical side of the adaptation process; and the critical success was analyzed in relation to meme theory, because this theory places a larger emphasis on the content of the adaptation.

The empirical data for cultural economy theory is chiefly Murray's book devoted to the topic, called *The Adaptation Industry: The Cultural Economy of Contemporary Literary Adaptation*. The analysis also considers interviews with some of the key agents in the adaptation process, conducted by online magazines, as well as benchmark publications in the United States. In the case of meme theory, the analysis considers scholarly articles discussing relevant topics concerning *The Blind Side*, in addition to both professional critical reviews and amateur reviews posted online. Both types of reviews serve to give an impression of the audience perception of the adaptation. Positive and negative reviews are analyzed with the aim of determining which memes were deemed favorable to the adaptation and which were not, with the objective of determining whether the adaptation is a critical success.

The results of the case study are limited by the scope of the thesis. The objective was to investigate whether one or more theories could explain why adaptations are made and how they ought to be studied, but the nature of the case study means that the results only indicate whether the theories explored in this thesis can explain why *The Blind Side* was adapted, and possibly all book to film adaptations, but this requires further research. Despite this shortcoming, the results suggest that it is fruitful to further investigate the applicability of the new framework on other types of adaptations, and finally determine whether it can explain all types of adaptations.

If this thesis were to find an audience the implications could theoretically be a new direction for adaptation studies. However, even an analysis like this is a theoretical exercise, and the findings need to be replicated in order to say anything with certainty. And maybe this is exactly what adaptation studies should focus on going forward? Case studies are vulnerable on their own, but together they bring valuable data to the field, and adaptations studies would greatly benefit from a consensus-based theoretical foundation on which to stand.

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