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Resistance to Materialism in *Into the Wild*

A Comparative Narratological Study of the Biography and the Film
Adaptation

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Abstract

Resistance to materialism in *Into the Wild*: A Comparative Narratological Study of the Biography and the Film Adaptation.

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From an environmental perspective, the earth's future has been, and is, a current and much-debated topic in today's society. Consumerism and materialism are two reasons why earth's natural resources run out earlier and earlier every year. One opponent of materialism whose life has been portrayed in Jon Krakauer's nonfiction biography *Into the Wild* and later in director Sean Penn's film adaptation with the same title was Christopher (Chris) McCandless (1968-1992). In Penn's film adaptation, materialism is made more prominent than in the biography, which gives an effect of directing criticism against a materialistic society. The theoretical framework is based on narratology and adaptation theory. Moreover, the method proceeds from close reading and comparative method to detect differences and similarities and to make a comparative analysis of the texts. One significant aspect was detected as essential when close reading the texts, namely: intertextuality. Hence, intertextuality served as a key concept in the analysis.

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Keywords: *Into the Wild*, Adaptation Theory, Narratology, Materialism.

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1. Introduction

There is no question that there are people who live in a materialistic world today. In modern terms, *materialism* is associated with the thought that only physical entities and money are of value and exist (Cambridge Dictionary). This implies that materialism does not acknowledge that any spiritual thoughts and beliefs are real or of any value (Smart). Social media, the easy access to online shopping, and advertising are significant drivers of consumerism and have never influenced people, who believe that money and possessions are means to achieve happiness and success, this much to consume more and believe that they *need* more money and new products than ever before. The materialistic mindset has led to the overconsumption of natural resources, and in 2021, the earth's annual resources ran out on July 29, almost a month earlier than the year before (Forsell). However, not everyone falls for the belief that more materialistic things and money lead to happiness. One opponent of a materialistic world was Christopher (Chris) McCandless (1968–1992). McCandless was an adventurous and sometimes daredevil young American whose life has been portrayed in Jon Krakauer's non-fiction biography *Into the Wild* and later in Sean Penn's film adaptation of the biography with the same title. Both the biography and the film adaptation revolve around the theme of resistance to materialism. However, in the film adaptation, the theme is made more prominent than in the biography due to the choice of different narrative techniques, which gives an effect that directs criticism against a materialistic society. The theme is made visual when close reading the texts, which makes it possible to compare and analyse how the theme differs in the texts. Moreover, the comparison and analysis will focus on intertextuality which enables the study to showcase how the theme is made more prominent in the adaptation.

1.1 *Into the Wild*

In the biography and the film adaptation *Into the Wild*, the reader and viewer follows Christopher (Chris) McCandless's adventures across America and his search for true happiness in nature. *Nature*, or *idealism*, is often defined as the opposite of civilisation and materialism and is important to this study since resistance to materialism can be seen when nature is presented and sometimes romanticised in the texts. Nature can be described as a view that neither money nor material belongings are of any or very little value. Instead, only the spiritual and the transcendental are and should be of importance to the human (Robinson).

After graduating from Emory University in Atlanta, Chris¹ donates the last money of his college fund to charity and cuts every identification– and credit card that can be traced back to him. He then sets out to hitch-hike across the Unites States with the intention of leaving a materialistic society behind. However, when Chris set out to leave civilisation behind, he also made an impact on his surroundings, for instance, leaving his friends and family behind without a word in order to pursue goals such as happiness and to almost be *re-born* to achieve the ultimate separation from his former life. His strive for happiness in nature and resistance to materialism eventually led to his death. Consequently, one can argue that nature, as an opposite to civilisation and materialism, has been romanticised in the book and the film adaptation. However, this essay will not focus on how nature has been romanticised but on how the theme of resistance to materialism is made prominent.

Two important genres to be aware of are the non-fictional biography and the semi-fictional film since both are analysed in this essay and differ from each other. Non-fiction biographies intend to stay as faithful as possible to reality; therefore, the author often attempts to only write about what he or she can prove (Kendall). Moreover, the author of non-fictional stories rarely adds information to make the story more intriguing or for dramatising effects (Kendall). Semi-fiction is a mix between non-fiction and fiction (Whiteman & Phillips 289). As a result, semi-fictional texts are more free to include different elements, although the author or director cannot prove that they have happened. Due to this, many semi-fictional texts contain both real events and people but also elements that have not happened in reality for dramatising effects or to enhance different aspects (289).

2. Background

The research regarding *Into the Wild*, book and film, is mainly dominated by social and political issues, ethical questions and the use of different narrative techniques in order to shed light on various themes and topics in the texts. Themes and topics that are frequently discussed and analysed are, for instance, relationships, idealism and society. Three persons who have investigated the above mentioned topics are Hanssen (2011), Lehman (2009) and Sánchez (2015).

Hanssen investigates both Krakauer's inclusion of Jack London and the works by London, such as *The White Fang* (1906) and *To Build a Fire* (1902). Hanssen's study shows that these works and the inclusion of London in the biography function as narrative techniques to show Chris's motivation to leave society and live as a tramp (191–197). Additionally, Hanssen discusses and compares both London's and McCandless's different backgrounds, where London comes from a financially vulnerable background whereas McCandless grew up in the upper-middle class (192–193). Her study shows that their financial upbringings might have affected how they chose to live a trapper life since London returned to his family to support their living, while McCandless left his family without any signs of a return (194–195). As a result, Hanssen sheds light on topics such as relationships, idealism and society.

Lehman studies Krakauer's narrative techniques and how he, in the medium of non-fiction, tells the story of *disaster narratives* (467), which *Into the Wild* is a part of. Lehman discusses a *man-vs-nature* theme which is present in several of Krakauer's texts. Lehman suggests that he incorporates the theme by doing two things. Firstly, he uses the non-fictional genre to write a "compelling historical narrative" (Lehman 467). Secondly, he relates the story, in this case Chris McCandless's story, to other people, mainly men, who have chosen a similar life or done similar things (Lehman 468–472) These two aspects make man-vs-nature a main theme and shows how narrative techniques makes it visual in the biography.

Sánchez focuses on idealism and nature and argues that Krakauer uses references to the American author, philosopher and transcendentalist Henry D. Thoreau and his texts in order to characterise McCandless as a Thoreauvian transcendentalist (40). Sánchez suggests that McCandless valued and aspired to live a life similar to Thoreau, which he describes in his book *Walden* (1854). In the book, he emphasises a simpler and authentic life in nature where

one can practise spirituality and absolute freedom instead of a life in civilisation, paved with materialism and money (Sánchez 43–45). Sánchez suggests that Krakauer characterises McCandless as a Thoreauvian transcendentalist by referring to Thoreau’s texts that are mainly concerned with three things: firstly, his economic ideas, which can be described as an opposition to market economy and materialism (43). Secondly, his belonging to liberalism, and thirdly, his view on nature and wilderness, which Krakauer describes as Thoreau’s “idealisation of nature and wilderness as a romantic pastoral garden where one can retreat from civilisation” (Sánchez 47). Thus, although he lived the majority of his life in civilisation, Thoreau valued nature and happiness in the freedom of nature higher than civilisation. Similar thoughts can be seen in McCandless in the book through different actions and the use of references he made in journals to, for instance, Thoreau. Two examples of how McCandless relates to Thoreau is his view on money and materialism and his idealisation of nature.

Intertextuality is a concept which derives from the Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure’s linguistic theories and the Russian literary theorist M. M. Bakhtin’s language and literary theories (Allen 2–3). However, the Bulgarian linguist Julia Kristeva is generally known to be the first one to use and define intertextual theory as she drew from ideas and thoughts from both Saussure’s and Bakhtin’s theories (3). Kristeva defines that intertextuality “invites the reader to interpret a text as a crossing of texts” (125). With this, Kristeva suggests that texts relate to other texts in different ways and that texts contain other texts.

An essential aspect of this study is the investigated texts’ media form since the biography is a typographic text and the adaptation is a film. A consequence of the different media forms is that the reading and interpretation of the two texts can differ (Kress 117). Both media forms transfer information to the reader or the viewer; however, *how* they transfer information varies between them due to the fact that the biography *tells* the story, whereas the film *shows* the story (117). A typographic text is often limited to written text and sometimes to still images, whereas a film has the possibility to use motion images, music, and speech. A film may also use written text and still images (118). A result of the typographic text’s limitation to written text and still images is that the film has additional possibilities to use more varying techniques to transfer a story. Moreover, since the film may use speech, sounds and music, the viewer can make use of the audio to interpret the story as well, which is not possible in a typographic text.

3. Theoretical framework and method

The theoretical framework for this study is based on adaptation theory and narratology. Adaptation theory will help outline the main similarities and differences in the texts, whereas narratology will enable a sharper analysis of the similarities and differences since it will identify different aspects in the texts and how they differ. Due to this, I will draw on Gérard Genette's narratology and his definitions of different narrative techniques in order to enable an analysis of the theme and the aspect of intertextuality.

Narratology focuses on the structures in a story and how a story is told. Narratology is used to analyse how structures in a story give it meaning and can be used on stories in different media, which validates its usefulness and value (Genette, *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method* 26–28). When applying narratology to a story, according to Genette, one does not only investigate the 'story', that is, the order of events from the beginning to the end, but how the story is packaged and presented to the reader or viewer (27, 29). Moreover, several methods have emerged from different narratologists on how to analyse stories, for instance, Tzvetan Todorov (1939), Gérard Genette (1930), and Vladimir Propp (1895). This study will draw on Genette's narratology since it provides definitions of elements that are used in different story-telling media, for instance, novels and films. The narrative elements structure how the story is told, how the reader or viewer interprets a story and how the reader or viewer is affected by the story (Felluga 184–185). Genette's narratology will, therefore, enable this analysis to detect elements in the texts and how these structure and affect the interpretation of the story, which will be used in the analysis. Genette defines elements such as mimesis, diegesis, and focalisation (*Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method* 161–194). These elements will shed light on what and how the theme of resistance to materialism differs in the biography and the adaptation.

Mimesis and *diegesis* are two concepts that are used to describe how a story is presented (Genette, *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method* 162–163). According to Genette, mimesis means 'showing' the story to the reader or viewer, which is a slow way to present a story (163–164, 166). Mimesis is described as a slow way to present a story because it presents the story to the reader as if she is present at the scene when it takes place (Genette 166–167). Diegesis, on the other hand, is the opposite of mimesis. Genette specifies that

diegesis means 'telling' (164). As a result, diegesis is a more rapid way to present the story to the reader or viewer since the story's voice can retell the dialogue and events without using direct speech and dramatising the scene to the reader (164–165).

According to Genette, focalisation is the concept that describes the “focus of narration” (*Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method*, 189), that is, from which perspective or point-of-view the reader or viewer *sees* the story (189–190). The story can be seen from different viewpoints, such as external, internal, or zero focalisation. External focalisation is when the story is told from outside the characters; thus, the reader only receives information about what she could see and hear as if she was present at the scene, that is, what the characters say and do (190–191). Internal focalisation, however, is when the reader enters the mind of a character and gains information about what a character thinks and feels without verbally expressing it, which is not possible if the focalisation is external (192–193). If the reader enters the minds of several different characters and gains access to their emotions and thoughts, the writer uses zero focalisation (Genette, *Narrative Discourse Revisited* 73–74).

Adaptation theory focuses on, in broad terms, how a text, or parts of a text, has been adapted into a new media form. Common adaptations are, for instance, novels, books or plays transferred into operas, films or tv-series (Konigsberg 6). Adaptation theory is a relatively new theory and has emerged as the genre of adaptations has continued to grow during the 20th- and 21st centuries. For example, since the cinema became a public entertainment attraction, filmmakers started to produce film adaptations of famous literary works, making the adaptation genre proliferate (McFarlane 6).

When reading, for instance, a review of an adaptation, it is not unusual to come across terms such as *betrayal*, *deformation* or *violation* to describe the adaptation, as adaptations often are considered subordinate to the original text (Stam 3). However, it can be challenging to interpret whether or not this analysis is someone's subjective opinion or if it is built on theories regarding adaptations that are generally considered acceptable. Kline (70–75) discusses four critical film adaptation paradigms, firstly, the ‘translation’ paradigm, secondly, the ‘pluralist’ paradigm, thirdly, the ‘transformation’ paradigm, and fourthly, the ‘materialist’ paradigm. These paradigms work as lenses when critically analysing film adaptations, where each paradigm sheds light on different qualities in the text.

The ‘translation’ paradigm is a way to determine how close or faithful the adaptation stays to the original text (Kline 70). If essential elements, especially characters, themes or settings, have gone through major changes in the adaptation, the critic may conclude that the adaptation is not faithful to the original text and thus, not successful (70–71).

The ‘pluralist’ paradigm can be described as analysing an adaptation’s ability to include significant aspects from the source text but at the same time function and be able to function and stand by itself (71–72). According to Kline, the adaptation’s mood, tone, and values are most important to be similar to the source text (71–72).

The ‘transformation’ paradigm is a way to examine adaptations that function almost as an original text. Thus, a greater separation occurs from the source text (72–73). Kline suggests that these adaptations only consider the source text as raw material which is used to make a new and different text (72–73). Some critics are fans of these transformative adaptations since they become new original works and not just “words changed into images” (Kline 73). However, it can be difficult to compare the transformative adaptation to the source text. Additionally, some critics argue that it is not possible or necessary to compare them (73).

The ‘materialist’ paradigm is concerned with investigating the adaptation through both the source text and the cultural and historical context (74). Critics explain that it is essential to examine adaptations from the cultural and historical context since texts, adaptations or not, are affected by the current society in which they are created (74–75). In conclusion, it is up to the critic to decide which paradigm is most suitable for analysing an adaptation depending on what a critic strives to investigate (Kline 81).

Linda Hutcheon suggests six questions as a further concretised method to analyse film adaptations and adaptations irrespectively of their media form. These questions are *what*, *how*, *who*, *why*, *when*, and *where*. However, only the questions that will bring out essential differences and similarities that correspond with the investigated subject and the aim of this study will be used. Thus, in this study, only the questions *what* and *how* will be explained and used since they will help outline the basic properties of the adaptation in terms of differences and similarities.

When one thinks about what has been adapted, one should be aware of two different aspects. Firstly, the adapted form of the source text. The source text may, for instance, be adapted into a film, TV series or video game (35). Secondly, the elements in the text, for instance, characters, themes or scenes. These elements may or may not be presented differently when they are transferred into a new media form. For example, a character may be described in one way in a novel but may be presented in a different way in a film adaptation. A theme may not be prominent in a novel but more prominent in an adaptation of the text (34–35).

When comparing a novel and its adaptation, critics tend to argue that the novel contains more details, information and length (Stam & Raengo 3). Hence, the adaptation is often put in a negative light when the focus lies on what is missing rather than what is there (3). When transferring a text into a new media form, it is essential to consider what, when, and why certain things are adapted and how they are adapted. Two key elements to consider are the knowing and the unknowing audience (Hutcheon 121). The knowing audience is the one who knows that the adaptation is an adaptation and is likely to have read the source text before. The unknowing audience, on the other hand, is not aware that the adaptation is an adaptation or has not read the source text (Hutcheon 121). Thus, they do not have pre-knowledge and expectations on the adaptation that the knowing audience probably has. Consequently, the one who adapts a text into a new media form tends to want to meet both groups' expectations.

Close reading is a method commonly used within the field of literature. To define what close reading is, one must first define what *reading* is as a method. Brummet states that reading is “an attempt to understand the socially shared meanings that are supported by words, images, objects, actions, and messages” (6). Thus, one considers not only the words that one reads but also other things such as images, objects, actions, and messages that contain information and can be of value to understanding and interpreting a text. In a *close reading*, one reads the text in a more careful, disciplined and aware way than in a *reading*. Brummet states that this method is useful in order to gain a deeper understanding of a text (8–9).

The comparative method is a technique to describe and explain different variables and how these variables relate to each other (Caramani 2). Additionally, the method enables one to investigate similarities and differences between two or more cases, as in this study which compares two texts (2). The method can be used in both quantitative and qualitative research depending on the number of cases one is investigating and comparing. Quantitative research

is often interested in generalising the studied subject and, therefore, needs a great number of cases. In contrast, qualitative research is not interested in generalisation and, therefore, uses fewer cases (Caramani 2). In this study, two texts are investigated and compared, which means that this study is qualitative and does not aim to make a generalisation.

4. Analysis

In this analysis, I will draw on Hutcheon's questions *what* and *how* regarding adaptations and Genette's narratology regarding narrative techniques to analyse and compare the texts. In both the biography and adaptation, intertextuality is an essential aspect that makes the theme of resistance to materialism more prominent in the adaptation compared to the biography. Thus, intertextuality will be a central part of the analysis.

Poems, letters and extracts from other texts are included in both the biography and the adaptation. However, they are given an even more prominent role in the adaptation compared to the biography. Moreover, Penn and Krakauer use different narrative techniques when they incorporate the texts; thus, the effect of incorporating texts differs between them. In the biography, every chapter starts with one of these texts, which gives it a cohesive structure. This is shown in both chapter one, which begins with a letter from Chris (Krakauer 3) and in chapter three, which begins with an extract from Leo Tolstoy's *Family Happiness* (1859) and an extract from Wallace Stegner's *The American West as Living Space* (1987) (Krakauer 39). Letters are also present occasionally within the chapters, as seen when Krakauer includes a letter from Chris to his friend and former employer Wayne Westerberg (33) and later when a letter from Ronald [Ron] A. Franz is included (48–49).

The adaptation follows a similar structure, that is, Penn follows the structure of chapters within the adaptation; however, Penn incorporates texts throughout the adaptation more frequently than Krakauer. As stated above, intertextuality begins directly in chapter one of the book where Krakauer includes a letter from Chris:

April 27th, 1992.

Greetings from Fairbanks! This is the last you shall hear from me Wayne.

Arrived here 2 days ago. It was very difficult to catch rides in the Yukon Territory. But I finally got here.

Please return all my mail I receive to the sender. It might be a very long time before I return south. If this adventure proves fatal and you don't hear from me again I want you to know you're a great man. I now walk into the wild. Alex.

(Krakauer 3)

The letter only provides the reader with Chris's location, a few thoughts and who has received it; however, there is no connection to materialism or nature in this letter. In the adaptation, however, Penn (0:01) includes the first five lines from Lord Byron's poem "Childe Harold's Pilgrimage [There is a pleasure in the pathless woods]" (1812):

There is a pleasure in the pathless woods,
There is a rapture on the lonely shore,
There is society where none intrudes,
By the deep Sea, and music in its roar:
I love not Man the less, but Nature more

The inclusion of this poem immediately gives the viewer a sense that nature has a higher status than society in the adaptation. Something that is not present as early in the biography. Additionally, it indicates that nature will be an important theme in the adaptation, which gives the viewer a hint of what light civilization and nature will be put in.

An example of where the book includes a text that concerns materialism is at the beginning of chapter twelve (Krakauer 117). The chapter begins with a text from Henry D. Thoreau's *Walden*, followed by a few notes and comments by Krakauer:

Rather than love, than money, than fame, give me truth. I sat at a table where were rich food and wine in abundance, an obsequious attendance, but sincerity and truth were not; and I went away hungry from the inhospitable board. The hospitality was as cold as the ices.

HENRY DAVID THOREAU,
WALDEN, OR LIFE IN THE WOODS
PASSAGE HIGHLIGHTED IN ONE OF THE BOOKS FOUND WITH
CHRIS MCCANDLESS'S REMAINS.
AT THE TOP OF THE PAGE, THE WORD "TRUTH" HAD BEEN WRITTEN
IN LARGE BLOCK LETTERS IN MCCANDLESS'S HAND.

(117)

The text by Thoreau has a clear correlation to materialism and nature as the author or the voice of the text refuses the abundance of food and wine but also money and fame at the

beginning of the text, which has a close connection to materialism. Whereas truth and sincerity, which do not exist around the table, have a closer connection to nature and what the person strives for. However, the comments and notes by Krakauer are the only texts that help the reader understand and interpret the reference to Thoreau. The references and the notes hint that Chris is someone who opposes materialism. However, these comments and notes do not emphasise the theme of materialism to any further extent.

The adaptation includes a shorter and slightly changed version of the same text by Thoreau in a conversation he has with his friend Jan. In the scene, Jan, her husband and Chris sit around a campfire, and the fire lights up their faces in the dark night.

Jan: Yeah Alex [Chris] could have a vehicle as well but he decided to burn all of his money. And why did you do that?

Chris: I don't need money. It makes people cautious.

Jan: Come on Alex, you have to be a little cautious. That book of yours is all cool and everything but you can't depend entirely on leaves and berries.

Chris: I don't know if I want to depend on much more than that.

[...]

Jan: You look like a loved kid, be fair.

Chris: Fair?

Jan: You know what I mean.

Chris: I paraphrase Thoreau here. "Rather than love, than money, than faith, than fame, than fairness, give me truth".

(Penn 0:27–0:28)

This dialogue between Jan and Alex is used to stress Chris's resistance to money and material possessions, which gives the adaptation a more multidimensional approach in showing the theme of resistance to materialism. The viewer is provided with several pieces of evidence of Chris's resistance to materialism in dialogue. First, through the information that he has burnt his money, second, his statement that he does not need money, third, that he does not want to depend on much, and fourth, his paraphrasing to Thoreau that he rather knows the truth than having money. The last piece of evidence corresponds to the definition of nature, which states that neither money nor materialistic possessions are of any value. One could argue that money, and materialistic possessions do not have values in themselves but only the value that humans ascribe to them. On the other hand, truth seems to have a value in itself in this

dialogue and, especially, a higher value than money. Additionally, the scene depicted romanticises to be in nature since it only provides the viewer with a positive image of sitting around a campfire. Consequently, nature is put in a positive light, indicating that nature is above civilization.

A significant difference between incorporating the reference to Thoreau in the book and the adaptation is the information connected to the text that the reader or viewer is provided with. In the book, as stated above, the information is limited. However, in the adaptation, Penn makes use of the dialogue before the reference to Thoreau to highlight Chris's opinions regarding materialism. By doing this, the viewer already is provided with a clear view of Chris and his opposition to materialism and is not left to interpret the theme by him/herself as in the book. Moreover, Penn's use of the reference to Thoreau is in line with Sanches suggestion that Krakauer uses Thoreau to characterise Chris as a Thoreauvian transcendentalist. Since Penn includes a similar reference as Krakauer, one can argue that he does this to show the reader Chris's similar thoughts and inspiration from Thoreau to live a life far from civilization.

Another instance where Penn incorporates texts within the adaptation is in the scene where Chris and his friend Jan go swimming at the beach. The two of them run happily into the water and play in the wild waves. At the same time, the waves splash against the camera which gives the viewer the feeling of being in the water together with Chris and Jan. Moreover, as Alex and Jan are bathing, the viewer hears Chris's voice read a passage from Primo Levi's short story *Bear Meat*:

The sea's only gifts are harsh blows, and occasionally the chance to feel strong. Now I don't know much about the sea, but I do know that that's the way it is here. And I also know how important it is in life not necessarily to be strong but to feel strong. To measure yourself at least once. To find yourself at least once in the most ancient of human conditions. Facing the blind deaf stone alone, with nothing to help you but your hands and your own head

(Penn: 0:33)

In this passage, the sea functions as a symbol for human life that can be rough and difficult. However, sometimes, one is strong, but most importantly, *feels* strong. Therefore, one should

test oneself at least once, relying only on oneself without money and materialistic possessions since this is when one truly knows how far one can go. By using this passage and Chris's voice, Penn enhances Chris's view that one should not be concerned with material possessions and money, since they will not make one aware of one's possibilities in challenging situations. Additionally, the scene portrays the sea as wild yet beautiful when the waves splash against the camera and the sun makes it sparkle (Penn 0:34). Thus, the effect of debasing money and materialistic possessions, while at the same time portraying the sea in a wild yet beautiful way, is that the environment and nature are given higher status compared to materialism and civilization.

In the biography, Krakauer incorporates a letter from Chris that he wrote to his friend Ron whom he advised to leave a safe and comfortable life for a more adventurous life on the road. In the letter, the reader can detect traces of materialism and nature.

So many people live within unhappy circumstances and yet will not take the initiative to change their situation because they are conditioned to a life of security, conformity, and conservatism, all of which many appear to give one peace of mind, but in reality nothing is more damaging to the adventurous spirit within a man than a secure future.

(Krakauer 58)

This section of the letter indicates that Chris does not support a life of security, conformity, and conservatism, especially not if it leads to unhappiness. These aspects, which might appear to bring peace of mind, actually control or kill one's adventurous spirit. A close reading of this section of the letter detects that a life of security, conformity, and conservatism, according to Chris, could mean a life in civilization paved by materialism since a stable employment and income can be considered means to reach security in life.

Chris's opinion that one should not depend on much is further emphasised in a letter that Krakauer includes:

Ron, I really hope that as soon as you can you will get out of Salton City, put a little camper on the back of your pickup, and start seeing some of the great work that God has done here in the American West. [...] And you must do it economy style, no

motels, do your own cooking, as a general rule, spend as little as possible and you will enjoy it much more immensely (59).

Through this letter, Krakauer shows the reader Chris's direct words regarding how one should live. He states that it is important to experience God's doing, that is, the environment and nature, with one's own eyes and prompts Ron to do it. Additionally, Chris emphasises the importance to experience nature and the environment without abundance and only with the most important necessities. One could argue that he does this because the feeling and the experience will be more fulfilling without the abundance of materialistic possessions. As Sánshes argues, Krakauer characterises Chris as a Thoreauvian transcendentalist. In this letter, both the first section and the second section, one can detect that Chris is a transcendentalist due to three reasons. Firstly, his love and respect for the environment. Secondly, his belief in individualism as he encourages Ron to set out alone to experience the country. Thirdly, his belief in idealism or nature, which is seen when he advises Ron to set out without too many comfortable things such as money which one can spend on motels and restaurants. These three aspects, out of many, are considered important for transcendentalists, and, since Chris shows signs of all of them, it is possible to argue that he is one. Thus, if Chris is a transcendentalist who admires nature and idealism, he is also naturally against materialism since it is the opposite of idealism.

A final example of how Penn makes the theme prominent in the adaptation is through the following lyrics from Vedder's song Society (2007), which was specially produced for this film:

¹Oh, it's a mystery to me
We have a greed, with which we have agreed
And you think you have to want more than you need
Until you have it all you won't be free

⁵Society, you're a crazy breed
I hope you're not lonely without me
When you want more than you have
You think you need
And when you think more than you want

Your thoughts begin to bleed
I think I need to find a bigger place
'Cause when you have more than you think
You need more space

(1:12)

The lyrics in the song have a connection to materialism, especially through two lines. The first line reads, “and you think you have to want more than you need” (1:12), and the second line reads “Cause when you have more than you think you need more space” (1:12). These lines indicate that some tend to believe that one needs more and more material possessions until there is no room left for all belongings, and, when there is no room left, the solution is to move to a bigger place to have room for even more. Furthermore, the second line implies that it seems like greed has become a natural part of human life, which some people, who are concerned with materialism, have agreed on. However, the lyrics take a turn in the fifth and sixth lines as society is described as a crazy breed which the voice of the lyrics does not want anything to do with. Thus, one can detect an underlying thought that society is the one to blame for human greed.

5. Conclusion

The aim of this essay was to analyse how narrative techniques make the theme of resistance to materialism more prominent in the film adaptation compared to the biography which gives an effect of directing criticism against a materialistic society.

The analysis was conducted by analysing the aspect of intertextuality in both the biography and the film adaptation. By including letters, poems and extracts from other texts, Krakauer uses intertextuality throughout the biography. An important finding was that the intertexts deal with materialism or idealism in different ways and to varying extent in the biography. A few intertexts have a clear connection to materialism or idealism, which gives the reader a sense of either resistance to materialism or support of idealism. However, most of the intertexts in the biography do not concern materialism or idealism in such a direct way. Instead, they deal with the themes more indirectly, which can be difficult for the reader to detect and interpret. For example, in the intertext by Thoreau (Krakauer 117), the narrator rejects money, fame and food in abundance if he cannot have the truth, which indicates that the narrator is against materialism. However, it requires the reader to have pre-knowledge about the theme to understand and interpret Thoreau's text as negative towards materialism. A result of Krakauer's use of intertexts is that materialism is present throughout the biography; however, not always in a straightforward way to the reader. The lack of information in connection to the intertexts and the theme results in two main conclusions. Firstly, it requires the reader to have pre-knowledge about the theme to enable her to detect it since the biography never explains what materialism is. Secondly, it leaves the reader to interpret the theme by herself and what it brings to the understanding of the story and the character Chris.

Similar to the biography, the film adaptation uses intertextuality throughout the story; however, in a different way than the biography. The analysis shows that the intertexts in the film concern materialism more frequently and in a more direct way than in the biography. Since the intertexts revolve around materialism more frequently and more directly, they shed light on the character Chris's view on and resistance to materialism, which is easier to understand and interpret than in the biography. One example of where the theme is prominent in the adaptation is when Penn includes Eddie Vedder's song "Society". One line of the lyrics reads, "society, you're a crazy breed, I hope you're not lonely without me" (Penn, 1:12), while

at the same time, the viewer sees Chris making his way in Alaska. The combination of the lyrics and the scene indicates that the lyrics are Chris's own thoughts regarding society and civilisation since he is the one who has left to live a life separated from society. Moreover, in the letter to Ron (Krakauer 58), the reader gains insight into Chris's battles against society's norms since he refuses, and expresses his disapproval of, a life of security, conformity, and conservatism. According to Chris, there is nothing more damaging to an adventurous spirit than a secure life. Chris's fight against society and thoughts that society damages the adventurous spirit make the theme of resistance to materialism prominent in Penn's film adaptation.

In conclusion, the theme of resistance to materialism in the adaptation *Into the Wild* shows a perspective of American society where materialism is questioned and criticised. Moreover, Penn uses intertexts that concern materialism in different ways, making the theme visual throughout the film adaptation. Compared to the adaptation, the theme is not as visual or apparent in the biography, which makes it harder for the reader to both detect and interpret the theme. As a result, the biography does not have an equally strong criticising effect on a materialistic society as the film adaptation.

6. Works Cited

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