

Transcendentalism and "into the wild"

[Entertainment](#), [Movie](#)



Into the Wild recalls the story of Chris McCandless and his journey into the Alaskan frontier. Throughout this experience Chris's values, choices, beliefs and lifestyle are all examined. McCandless's ideals and actions mirrored that of the transcendentalism.

Transcendentalism was a movement in the 1830-40's. This group led by Ralph Waldo Emerson had a unique set of beliefs and values. The group's views were transfixed on individuality, the limitless potential of humans, emotion and feeling over intellect, " Transcendentalists believed in numerous values, however they can all be condensed into three basic, essential values: individualism, idealism, and the divinity of nature" (CITE), all of which are apparent through McCandless's life. Chris was a nonconformist who found himself in solitude, and nature. Chris wanted to find and fill a transcendent experience.

Transcendentalism was a movement in the 1830's and 40's in New England. They believed everyone could transcend limits and had limitless potential. They also believed that routine and constancy was never good for anyone and avoided it. Individualism was a priority for them, and they held this belief towards many topics including government. They did not believe in big-government but rather in self government. The transcendentalists valued self-reliance has a way of life that mirrored their sporadic lifestyles.

The first sign of Chris McCandless's lifestyle, beliefs and values mirrored the transcendentalist philosophy, when upon graduating from college Chris changed his name. "... he intended to invent an utterly new life for himself, one in which he would be free to wallow in unfiltered experience. To

symbolize the complete severance from his previous life, he even adopted a new name." (Krauknaur 18). He name himself Alexander Supertramp. This completely defies what society puts in place as a guideline for traditional life. By stripping himself of his birth name, it was representative of him starting a new life. He was longer following the blazed by his parents or society. He was going against the grain.

Chris's "' great Alaskan odyssey...'" (Kraunaur 33) was completely representative of the transcendentalist philosophy. One concept the transcendentalists believed was that personal experience led to the deepest truth. By going to Alaska by himself and experiencing it without restrictions, Chris was able to fully obtain his own personal truth and find himself as a person. This is evident through the journal excerpt left by Chris.

Chris disregarded rules as pointless and did not follow them unless he thought necessary. Even in his teenage years he showed a strong disregard of the restrictions imposed by others. His highschool teacher had specific rules on the format of a lab reports, " Chris thought it was a stupid rule and decided to ignore it" (Krakauer 76), and as a result he received an F in the class. Similarly, the transcendentalists believed that each person had the right to make decisions for themselves without influence from higher authority. Their views were the same as Chris's, as they too thought the rules set by other were of little importance. Individual conscience was more important than laws or rules. Leaders of the movement, such as Henry David Thoreau, encouraged this behavior of self government and the disillusionment with large overbearing governments. McCandless also voices

his opinion on government, " How I feed myself is none of the government's business. F*** their stupid rules" (Krakauer 7). Both agreed that government should not have such an active role. Henry David Thoreau voiced this through his writing, Civil Disobedience, " I believe,—“ That government is best which governs not at all..." They both share the view of self-government/authority.

Transcendentalist valued in individuality and self-reliance. They believed personal growth was achieved through experience. The purpose of Chris's journey was to find himself and prove to himself that he could make it on his own. In the Alaskan frontier he was completely self-reliant having to fend for himself in entirety. Chris secluded himself from the town in attempt to find himself. He cut off relationship with his family and a " normal" lifestyle. Henry David Thoreau embarked on a similar endeavor which he accounted in his writing, Walden. He spent two years at Walden where he attempted to live secluded and off the grid. When Ron Franz tried to adopt Chris as his grandson, Chris was hesitant towards his offer. In a letter he sent to Fran his strong belief of individuality was evident, " You are wrong if you think Joy emanates only or principally from human relationships" (Kraunaur 41).

Chris's lifestyle was also very unpredictable, he never stayed in one place for an extended amount of time. This corresponds to the belief that routine is bad for a person. Transcendentalist believed that consistency and routine should be avoided, and that changing behavior is necessary to learn. Routines combat and diminish individuality. Chris tried to defies this sense of confinement and " We just have to have the courage to turn against our

habitual lifestyle and engage in unconventional living" (Krauknaur 41). He alienate himself from others.

Much like the transcendentalist, Chris believed in simplicity. " I say, let your affairs be as two or three, and not a hundred or a thousand; instead of a million count half a dozen, and keep your accounts on your thumb nail" (Walden). People often get caught up in the details and loose focus on the important things. As best quoted by Henry David Thoreau, " Simplicity, simplicity, simplicity!" This is the lifestyle that McCandless embodied and pursued. He ventured into the Alaskan frontier with only the bare essentials. The amount of supplies he had for his journey seemed minimal, " His gear seemed exceedingly minimal for the harsh conditions of the interior, which in April still lay buried under the winter snowpack" (Kraukaur 6). This new life he was trying to find was one that was desolate. In college Chris's apartment was bare and desolate, only a few thing were in the space. " I don't want to know what time it is. I don't want to know what day it is or where I am. None of that matters" (CITE).

Chris did not see value in materialistic things. He burnt all of his money and abandoned his car because he simply did not need them, " He changed his name, gave the entire balance of a twenty-four-thousand-dollar savings account to charity, abandoned his car and most of his possessions, burned all the cash in his wallet" "...McCandless documented the burning of his money..." (Krauknaur 21). He never allowed society's standards to define him. His give all of his money away to the OXFAM America charity. This simplistic lifestyle was preached by transcendentalist, such as Thoreau. "

Instead of three meals a day, if it but necessary eat one; instead of a hundred dishes, five; and reduce other things in proportion..." (Walden).

Nothing in excess was preached, and the main focus was trying to achieve this transcendental experience

Kinship and unity with nature was highly valued belief within both of their lifestyles. Nature was regarded as a guide for humanity. Chris had sought the guidance when went into the woods in search of himself. Also when he shot and killed the moose he was excited but soon became distraught over the act, " I now wish I had never shot the moose. One of the greatest tragedies of my life" (Krauknaur 114). This displays his deep connection to nature. " If a plant cannot live according to its nature, it dies; and so a man" (Thoreau #). Chris always felt rejuvenated and childlike in nature. Even into his twenties he felt the same way, " Chris loved those trips, the longer the better. There was always a little wanderlust in the family, and it was clear early on that Chris had inherited it" (Krauknaur 75). His family was sure to note the contentment he got from these excursions. In Nature, by Ralph Waldo Emerson, he states, " The lover of nature is he whose inward and outward senses are still truly adjusted to each other; who has retained the spirit of infancy even into the era of manhood" (Nature). This corresponds to the transcendentalistic belief that nature makes any one feel youthful.

The transcendentalist were nonconformists, viewing society a thief of individuality. Chris, along with transcendentalist, were fed up with society trying to conform them. People often talked about Chris voicing his views on

this topic, "...he'd fulminate about his parents or politicians or the endemic idiocy of mainstream American life" (Kraunaur 37). Both believed that

Careers are meant to constant and stable. They tend to keep a person in the sam spot for and extended period of time. Chris had no intention of settling down and finding a career prior to his trip. " When Walt and Billie suggested that he needed a college degree to attain a fulfilling career, Chris answered that careers were demeaning " twentieth-century inventions," more of a liability than an asset, and that he would do fine without one, thank you" (Kraukanur 79). "...Imitation is Suicide" (Self-Reliance). To be the same has everyone else was not something they wanted.

The first sign of Chris McCandless's lifestyle, beliefs and values mirrored the transcendentalist philosophy, when upon graduating from college Chris changed his name. "... he intended to invent an utterly new life for himself, one in which he would be free to wallow in unfiltered experience. To symbolize the complete severance from his previous life, he even adopted a new name." (Krauknaur 18). He name himself Alexander Supertramp. This completely defies what society puts in place as a guideline for traditional life. By stripping himself of his birth name, it was representative of him starting a new life. He was longer following the blazed by his parents or society.

It was quite evident that Chris had no intention of settling down and finding a career prior to his trip. " When Walt and Billie suggested that he needed a college degree to attain a fulfilling career, Chris answered that careers were demeaning " twentieth-century inventions," more of a liability than an asset, and that he would do fine without one, thank you" (Kraukanur 79). This

mirrors the transcendentalist value of avoiding consistency. They had drilled Chris with the thoughts of Harvard Medical School, which for them meant happiness and success. But this was not what Chris wanted for himself, thus the name change was him breaking out of this mold and animated life they had created for him. " When Walt and Billie suggested that he needed a college degree to attain a fulfilling career, Chris answered that careers were demeaning " twentieth-century inventions," more of a liability than an asset, and that he would do fine without one, thank you" (Kraukanur 79). He did not want to be like everyone else which showed his individualism and how he was avoiding consistency,

When he is hopeful of return, he writes " happiness is real when shared" (Kraunaur #). Prior to his exertion he had a completely different mindset, but after experiencing life in the wild he was able to find out what his true beliefs and values were.