

Into the wild by jon krakauer essay

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



Rural nature has always been a source of inspiration for many American writers. Jon Krakauer is not an exception. Extreme weather and challenging conditions are the perfect backgrounds for exploring people's psyche. In his famous book *Into the Wild*, Krakauer studies a story of “a well-educated young man with an above-average intellect and remarkable spiritual ambitions” (Vera, 2015, p. 43). The book explores many topics, such as difficulties in family relationships, the meaning of reaching manhood, materialism, and capitalism. This paper focuses on covering the characters of the book, especially Christopher McCandless, and studying the central theme — the search for personal freedom in times of modernity.

The book describes the details of real-life Christopher McCandless, a young man who decides to abandon past life. Shortly after graduating from a prestigious college, Christopher “cuts himself off both from his family and from the values and symbolic roles expected of him” (Hook, 2018, p. 5). Before taking off, he gives up his real name and takes a moniker Alexander Supertramp. McCandless starts a journey to the West and then into the Alaskan wilderness, looking for solitude and escape from societal norms. He spends his time hitchhiking, exploring nature on foot, and a canoe. At some point, Alex applies for a job in Los Angeles but then returns to his original plan (Krakauer, 2011). McCandless tests his limits by hunting, foraging, and camping alone. Eventually, he dies of starvation in an abandoned bus, where locals find his body.

Christopher McCandless, Alexander Supertramp, or simply Alex is the protagonist of the novel, an Emory University graduate who recently finished his education. According to Vera (2015), he disliked “money and

mainstream values, despite the fact—or rather because of the fact—that he was “ flipping Quarter Pounders at McDonald’s” (p. 46). Alex grew up with his parents and a younger sister, Carine, and had a classic father-son relationship issue. The parents, Billie and Walt, assumed that their son would pursue a career as a lawyer, but instead, he donated all of the money to charity (Krakauer, 2011). Walt, an aerospace engineer, dismissed his son’s decision to travel. Eventually, the family members concluded that they misread Alex and never really knew anything about his intentions.

During the journey, the main character encountered many locals and created strong bonds with several people. One of them was Wayne Westerberg, a thick-shouldered hyperkinetic man (Krakauer, 2011). Westerberg owned a grain elevator in Carthage and gave Alex a job. He appreciated the intelligence and hard-working nature of the young man (Krakauer, 2011). Jim Gallien was a driver who encountered Alex on his way to the Alaskan wilderness. During the two-hour drive, Gallien concluded that McCandless was not another delusional traveler, but a determined and intelligent person, who lived by his choice. However, the driver tried to talk Alex out of the survival quest because this hitchhiker did not have the necessary equipment for the journey. Both Westerberg and Gallien positively changed their opinion about McCandless during the encounter.

Jan Burres and Bob met McCandless in the summer of 1990 when he was looking for berries alongside the highway. The couple offered him a ride and meal because Alex looked exhausted and extremely malnourished. The young man accepted the offer and camped with Burres and her partner for a

week. Jan had a connection with Alex because she missed her son. Bob also had much in common with their new friend, as he too was interested in survivalism. Together they sold books at the local flea market, and Alex demonstrated enthusiasm as a salesman. McCandless kept in touch with the couple by sending them postcards even after two years after their departure.

Ronald Franz, another acquaintance of Alex, was an 80-year-old retired army veteran who once had issues with alcohol. Franz was different from other companions: although the old man provided the traveler with meals and necessary equipment, he also gave Alex emotional support and was like a father to him. He urged McCandless to leave a camp as he considered it to be a negative influence for a young man. However, he took McCandless' advice against a passive lifestyle and waited for the return of his new friend. Franz was worried about the destiny of an ambitious adventurer and even wanted to adopt him. When he found out about McCandless' death, he resumed drinking and gave up his belief in God.

Exploring the life of Christopher McCandless, Krakauer explores a number of topics such as family relationship, maturity, and manhood as well as survival in a capitalist society. However, the main idea of the book is freedom and its importance when a person is trapped inside a system of norms and rules. Sheils and Walsh (2017) state that the main character's escape "signified precisely this, an attempted escape from—or opposition to—a given societal form of the symbolic order" (p. 136). To Alex, the only way to start a new life and find peace was to abandon the typical order of the life of an affluent American.

One could believe that the main character was actually a spiritually weak rebel, as he did not prepare himself for the journey and died for no purpose. On the surface level, there was not any reason for a well-to-do young man to give up his privileges and possibilities. Nonetheless, it should be noticed that Alex had full determination to change his life, and none of his actions was meaningless. According to Vera (2015), “ McCandless created his poverty by artificial means, which might have been inspired by Thoreau’s condemnation of the market economy and materialism” (p. 46). It is possible to agree that the trip to Alaska offered him freedom and meaning. Although the main character of the book could have avoided the unnecessary challenge of wild nature, his decision deserves respect for strong determination and complete devotion to one’s beliefs and ideas.

Into the Wild covers the story of a young man who decided to test his abilities and personal qualities in the harsh conditions of Alaska. The man who considered himself to be impotent to connect with people eventually communicates and bonds with total strangers. The novel examines topics that are traditional for American and European literature, such as interpersonal relationships, psychological maturity, personal struggles in the system of beliefs that traps and diminishes individual desires and choices. The main topic is personal freedom as the real purpose of life, which can only be achieved by means of difficult choices. The book explains that personal decisions should be respected, no matter how different they are in one’s opinion.

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