

Tribhuvan University

Going beyond the Wild: An Ecosophical Exploration of Jon Krakauer's *Into the Wild*

A Thesis Submitted to

The Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Tribhuvan University,

in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Arts in English

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June 2023

Letter of Recommendation

Basanta Poudel has completed his thesis "Going beyond the Wild: An Ecosophical Exploration of Jon Krakauer's *Into the Wild*" under my supervision. He has completed his research on June 2023. I hereby recommend this thesis to be submitted for viva voce.

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## Letter of Approval

This thesis entitled "Going beyond the Wild: An Ecosophical Exploration of Jon Krakauer's *Into the Wild* " submitted to the Central Department of English, T.U., Kirtipur by Basanta Poudel, has been approved by the undersigned members of the research committee.

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## Acknowledgments

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to my research advisor Sharad Chandra Thakur, Central Department of English for his intellectual guidance, critical comments, genuine suggestions, and for providing essential materials. His supervision and inspiration and suggestions helped me to prepare this research paper.

I am deeply indebted to Jib Lal Sapkota, the head of the Central Department of English, Tribhuvan University, for approving this research paper in its present form. I am grateful to him for his valuable suggestions and guidance.

I would also like to express my gratitude to other lecturers and my colleagues who really motivated me while making my research paper.

Likewise, I must wholeheartedly acknowledge my deep gratitude to my father and brothers for their great encouragement.

Basanta Poudel

June 2023

## Going beyond the Wild: An Ecosophical Exploration of Jon Krakauer's *Into the Wild*

### Abstract

*This paper, titled "Going beyond the Wild: An Ecosophical Exploration of Jon Krakauer's Into the Wild analyzes Krakauer's biography of Christopher McCandless through the lens of ecosophy, which recognizes the interconnectedness of human subjectivity, the environment, and social relations. To navigate the complex and intersecting themes in the text, the paper adopts the insights of leading eco-critics and philosophers, such as Arne Naess and Felix Guattari, who advocate for an ecological philosophy, Eco-sophy, which studies the complex phenomena of human subjectivity, environment, and social relations, all of which are intimately interconnected. The approach suggested by Naess and Guattari provides a powerful and illuminating framework for interrogating the issues raised in the text.*

*The paper examines how Into the Wild depicts a young man's quest for meaning and transcendence, drawing inspiration from literary figures such as Leo Tolstoy and Thoreau. By examining McCandless' journey, the analysis highlights how it may no longer be possible to consider nature and culture as two separate entities due to the domestication of nature and humans alike. Additionally, the analysis further discusses the potential reasons why individuals such as McCandless may feel a need to turn to nature as a solution for the problems they may experience in their lives.*

**Keywords:** Ecocriticism, Deep Ecology, Eco-Sophy, Interconnectedness, Transcendentalism

In May 1992, Christopher McCandless, a young man with a fervent desire for adventure and a disdain for the trappings of modern society, ventured into the Alaskan wilderness with little more than a backpack and a few supplies. He had cut all ties with his family and friends and was determined to carve out a new path for himself in the untamed wilderness. However, his quest for freedom and self-discovery ended in tragedy, as he succumbed to starvation and exposure after more than 100 days alone in the unforgiving wilderness. McCandless' story, chronicled in Jon Krakauer's book *Into the Wild*, has captivated readers and scholars alike, prompting a deeper examination of the complex themes of human subjectivity, environment, and social relations.

This research paper offers a critical analysis of McCandless' journey, exploring the underlying cultural and philosophical forces that drove him to seek refuge in the wild. Through an ecosophical lens, we examine the intersections between human subjectivity, environment, and social relations, and how they are intimately connected in the contemporary world. Drawing upon the insights of leading eco-critics and philosophers such as Arne Naess and Felix Guattari, who advocate for an ecological philosophy known as Eco-sophy, we reveal how McCandless' tragic story reflects broader cultural and philosophical concerns about the relationship between humans and the natural world.

At its core, this research paper argues that the traditional dichotomy between nature and culture is no longer viable in the modern world. As humans have increasingly domesticated and commodified nature, they have also domesticated themselves, creating a world in which the lines between the natural and the cultural are blurred. McCandless' story illuminates the tensions that arise when individuals seek to reject the strictures of modern society and embrace the wilderness as a refuge. Through a careful analysis of McCandless' journey and the cultural and philosophical context in which it occurred, this research paper offers new insights into the enduring appeal of wilderness and the

importance of rethinking our relationship with the natural world.

Through his experiences, McCandless highlights the importance of reconnecting with the natural world and rejecting the materialistic values of modern society. His journey is a powerful example of the transformative power of nature and the potential for individuals to find fulfillment and meaning outside of material possessions. The paper argues that an understanding of ecosophy can help us reconnect with the natural world and find a more meaningful and fulfilling way of living. Ultimately, the paper reveals how the book captures the essence of a young man who seeks meaning and transcendence by embracing the teachings of literary icons such as Arne Naess, Felix, and Thoreau, who championed the ideals of realism, ecological philosophy, and transcendentalism.

The interconnectedness of all things is a central theme of ecosophy, and Jon Krakauer's *Into the Wild* offers a vivid portrayal of this concept. Through his depiction of the natural world as both beautiful and dangerous, Krakauer illustrates the complex and interdependent relationship between human beings and the environment. The protagonist of the book, Christopher McCandless, embodies this relationship as he seeks to connect with nature and live in harmony with it.

Inspired by renowned authors like Henry David Thoreau, Jack London, and Leo Tolstoy, who held special significance for him, Christopher McCandless, also known as Alexander Supertramp, embarked on a personal journey in search of something more profound in life. "He carried a Remington .22-caliber rifle, a sleeping bag, cooking utensils, and a collection of paperback books, including Thoreau's *Walden*, London's *The Call of the Wild*, and Tolstoy's *Family Happiness* and *The Death of Ivan Ilych*" (Krakauer 49), McCandless ventured into the Alaskan wilderness in May 1992, never to be seen alive again.

McCandless' transformative journey, documented by Jon Krakauer in his book

*Into the Wild*, has become a prominent aspect of 21st-century popular culture. Despite the novel's seemingly niche appeal for a thesis analysis, McCandless' story has resonated with a vast audience, and Krakauer himself has established his prominence as one of the era's renowned writers. "Despite the novel's seemingly niche appeal for a thesis analysis, McCandless' story has resonated with a vast audience" (Corba). *Into the Wild* has received numerous nominations, accolades, and critical acclaim, making it a captivating and relevant choice for ecocritical analysis. "Moreover, the growing popularity of backpacking as a modern rite of passage and the increasing desire among travelers to venture off the conventional paths can lead people to take unnecessary risks when backpacking in the Alaskan wilderness" (Holland) further underscores the significance of analyzing *Into the Wild* from an ecocritical perspective. McCandless' inadvertent influence has inspired countless travelers, while Krakauer has received thousands of letters applauding McCandless for his rejection of societal conformity and materialism, allowing him to live authentically and test his own limits. Simultaneously, Krakauer has also received letters criticizing McCandless as arrogant, ill-prepared, and mentally unstable, using epithets such as "an idiot." Irrespective of these differing opinions, McCandless' story has captivated readers and movie enthusiasts who find allure in his Alaskan odyssey, perhaps driven by their own quests for answers that elude them in the complexities of modern existence.

Scholars have previously conducted analyses of Christopher McCandless, drawing comparisons between him and his favorite authors, Thoreau and London. However, this essay does not seek to replicate those analyses. Instead, its objective is to examine the representations of nature in Jon Krakauer's *Into the Wild* from an ecocritical perspective and explore their relevance within this contemporary literary work. This analysis also highlights the enduring significance of the novel's message in the present decade,

paralleling the emergence of ecocriticism in the 1980s.

The basis of this essay lies in the introduction to ecocriticism presented in Greg Garrard's book "*Ecocriticism*." This theoretical framework, along with contributions from renowned ecocritics such as Arne Naess, Felix Guattari, Laurence Coupe, Kenneth Burke, and William Rueckert, provides the foundation for analyzing the novel. These theories are utilized to examine various aspects, including the relationship between nature and culture, the concept of nature as a cultural or linguistic construct, and the connection between nature and transcendence.

The study is limited to the following aspects: (a) This study focuses on the analysis of a single primary source, *Into the Wild* by Jon Krakauer, as the central subject of investigation; (b) the study pays special attention to exploring the relationship between nature and culture, and the concept of nature as a cultural or linguistic construct from the perspective of "ecocriticism" and "deep ecology"; however, it is important to note that this research is limited in scope and does not encompass other dimensions of the human-nature relationship; (c) the findings and results derived from this study cannot be generalized to every aspect of the nature-culture relationship.

The research findings of this study hold significance for various applications. By delving into the intricate interplay between nature and culture, it contributes to the field of ecocriticism and deep ecology, shedding light on the complex ways in which human societies perceive and interact with the natural world. The study's emphasis on nature as a cultural or linguistic construct offers valuable insights into the ways in which language and cultural systems shape our understanding and representation of nature. Furthermore, the findings of this research have implications for environmental conservation and sustainability efforts. Examining the human-nature relationship through the lens of cultural constructs prompts a critical examination of our societal values, beliefs, and

practices concerning the environment.

The primary narrator of the nonfiction novel *Into the Wild* is Jon Krakauer, who presents the account from a third-person perspective. In his storytelling, Krakauer integrates his own personal experiences from his Alaskan expedition to provide insight and introspection into the protagonist McCandless' quest. By incorporating himself as a secondary character, Krakauer transforms McCandless' narrative of his wilderness odyssey into a tale that can be analyzed from an ecocritical standpoint. This fusion of fictional storytelling, along with Krakauer's own conclusions and interpretations, contributes to the exceptional nature of the story. Additionally, Krakauer utilizes the writings of authors such as Thoreau, London, and Tolstoy to enrich McCandless' character within the novel. Direct quotes from McCandless' journal and primary sources, including letters, imbue the work with epistolary elements, reinforcing the fact that this is a true story. Krakauer states "I have supplemented McCandless's own account with interviews of people who knew him, along with my own research into the Alaskan wilderness and the challenges of survival there" (Krakauer 13). While the legitimacy of McCandless' journal can be scrutinized, the author's research and the testimonies of those who crossed paths with McCandless suggest that he was likely truthful in his accounts. Instead of questioning McCandless' words, it is more prudent to approach the story with skepticism regarding how much of it truly represents his own perspective, had he been alive, and how much is speculative or interpretative on the part of the author. Indeed, some readers may perceive Krakauer's inclination to embellish or romanticize McCandless' experiences.

"McCandless hailed from a privileged background and excelled in academics and elite sports. He graduated with honors from Emory University in 1990, even earning an invitation to join Phi Beta Kappa, which he declined, asserting that "titles and honors are

irrelevant" (Krakauer 18). The novel commences with the day McCandless was last seen before venturing into the Alaskan wilderness, and subsequently recounts the discovery of his lifeless body. After this gripping introduction, the remainder of *Into the Wild* unfolds in chronological order. It commences with McCandless' final years in society, establishing his character, followed by his two-year journey subsequent to his university graduation, during which he severed ties with his family and donated his entire savings. The crux of the story commences in April 1992 when McCandless is dropped off near Mt. Kinley in Denali, Alaska, embarking on a trek *Into the Wild* from which he would never return. He spent 112 days in the Alaskan wilderness before ultimately succumbing to starvation. The narrative traces McCandless' rejection of societal norms and his transformative two-year journey leading up to his fateful venture into the wild.

Ecocriticism, as a scholarly field, is dedicated to the examination of the intricate relationship between nature and culture, with a specific emphasis on recognizing the significance of nature and its appropriation within cultural contexts. According to Greg Garrard, a prominent scholar in the field, "Ecocriticism encompasses a comprehensive and wide-ranging analysis of the dynamic interaction between human beings and the non-human realm, spanning the entirety of human cultural history. Central to this inquiry is a critical analysis of the very concept of "human itself" (Garrard 20). Thus, ecocriticism posits that the notion of humanity is not a fixed or static construct but rather one that is open to analysis and subsequent re-interpretation. While the influence of nature can be examined in various dimensions of culture, literature emerges as an exceptionally fertile domain for investigating the nuanced representations of nature. In a similar vein, Rueckert defines ecocriticism as the application of ecological principles and concepts to the study and analysis of literature.

Cheryll Glotfelty offers a definition of ecocriticism specifically within the realm

of literature. According to Glotfelty,

Ecocriticism is the study of the relationship between literature and the environment, and of the ways in which environmental ideas are developed and contested in literary texts. It is a relatively new field of literary criticism, but it has grown rapidly in recent years as scholars have become increasingly aware of the importance of environmental issues. Ecocritics examine the ways in which literature reflects and shapes our relationship with the natural world. They look at how literary texts represent nature, how they construct our understanding of the nonhuman world, and how they explore our relationships with other species. Ecocritics also consider the ways in which literature can be used to raise awareness of environmental issues, challenge our anthropocentric (human-centered) view of the world, and promote environmental activism. (Glotfelty and Fromm 1)

Ecocriticism can be understood as the scholarly application of ecological principles and concepts to the study, interpretation, and analysis of literary texts. In this context, ecocriticism explores the intricate connections between literature and the natural world, examining how environmental concerns, human-nature relationships, and ecological themes are portrayed and represented within literary works. By employing an ecological lens, ecocriticism aims to shed light on the ecological implications, cultural perspectives, and ethical dimensions embedded within literary narratives, thus enriching our understanding of both literature and the environment.

Ecocriticism, as a critical discourse, has undergone significant development over time, marked by two discernible waves. While the exact boundaries between these waves may be fluid, Lawrence Buell, a prominent figure in the field, offers valuable insights into the contrasting features of first-wave and second-wave

ecocriticism. "First-wave ecocriticism, in the 1980s and early 1990s, was largely concerned with overcoming what we might call the "nature-human" dichotomy, or what John Elder has called "the great divide." This dichotomy was seen as a legacy of the Enlightenment, and it was seen as responsible for the exploitation of nature. Ecocritics sought to overcome the nature-human dichotomy by showing that humans are part of nature, and that nature has intrinsic value" (Buell,45). Moreover, this perspective regarded nature writing as the primary genre representing environmental concerns.

However, the subsequent emergence of second-wave ecocriticism expanded the horizons of the field. Second-wave ecocriticism recognizes that the environment encompasses not only pristine natural landscapes but also constructed environments, including urban and built spaces. It embraces a broader perspective that acknowledges the interconnections between nature, culture, and society. By considering diverse environmental contexts, second-wave ecocriticism encourages a more nuanced understanding of the complex relationships between humans and their surroundings. The evolution of ecocriticism reflects a deepening recognition of the intricate entanglements between nature, culture, and the human experience. This broader understanding allows for a more inclusive examination of environmental issues, encompassing not only pristine wilderness but also urban environments, technology, and human-built spaces. By embracing multiple perspectives and interrogating the intersections of nature and culture, ecocriticism plays a crucial role in shaping our understanding of the complex environmental challenges we face and offers insights into fostering more sustainable and harmonious relationships with our environment.

Ecocriticism, being inherently interdisciplinary, welcomes diverse perspectives to comprehend the coexistence of living and non-living entities. It transcends the mere

analysis of nature in literature and instead represents a paradigm shift towards a bio-centric worldview. This shift entails an extension of ethics, a broadening of human conceptions, and the inclusion of the global community to encompass non-human life forms and the physical environment. At its core, ecocriticism upholds the principle of "earth-centeredness."

The concept of "deep ecology" provides valuable insights into the intricate relationship between humans and the non-human world. Devall and Sessions present significant ideas regarding deep ecology, shedding light on its principles and implications, and offer the following ideas about deep ecology:

The well-being and flourishing of human and nonhuman life on Earth have value in themselves (synonyms: inherent worth; intrinsic value, inherent value). These values are independent of the usefulness of the nonhuman world for human purposes. The richness and diversity of life forms contribute to the realization of these values and are also values in themselves. Humans have no right to reduce this richness and diversity except to satisfy vital needs. The flourishing of human life and cultures is compatible with a substantial decrease in the human population. The flourishing of nonhuman life requires such a decrease. (Devall<sup>23</sup>)

David Landis Barnhill and Roger S. Gottlieb offer insightful perspectives on deep ecology:

Deep ecology is more than a love of nature or a simple recognition of the environmental crisis. It is a philosophy that calls for a fundamental shift in human values, away from anthropocentrism and towards biocentrism. This shift would mean recognizing that all life has intrinsic value; regardless of its usefulness to humans. Deep ecology is not just about protecting nature, it is also about transforming our relationship with nature. It is about seeing us as part of nature,

not apart from it. It is about recognizing that we have a responsibility to care for the Earth and all its creatures (Barnhill and Gottlieb 11).

Deep ecology is a comprehensive environmental philosophy that encompasses a holistic understanding of the interconnectedness and interdependence of all life forms. It recognizes the intrinsic value and rights of non-human entities and advocates for an egalitarian perspective that acknowledges the equal worth of all living beings. Deep ecology challenges the anthropocentric view that places humans as superior and emphasizes the importance of preserving ecological balance.

Deep ecology perceives nature as a complex organism, an interconnected web of life where every component plays a vital role. It calls for reverence and respect towards all parts of the non-human world, fostering a sense of harmony and coexistence. This reverence extends beyond individual species or ecosystems, encompassing the entirety of the natural world.

To live in accordance with deep ecology principles, humans are urged to transform their perceptions and develop a habit of engaging with the environment in an eco-friendly manner. This involves reevaluating our relationship with nature, adopting sustainable practices, and prioritizing the preservation of ecological integrity. By embracing deep ecology, individuals can contribute to more harmonious and sustainable coexistence with the non-human world, aligning with the goals and principles of ecocriticism.

Naess defines "ecosophy" as wisdom to understand natural human relations and their value priorities in the modern world. "The anthropocentric bias of our culture has led us to see nature primarily as a source of raw materials and a sink for our wastes. This has resulted in a variety of environmental problems, including pollution, habitat destruction, and species extinction. If we are to solve these

problems, we need to change our attitude towards nature. We need to see nature as a community of intrinsic value, not as a collection of resources to be exploited" (Naess and Rothenberg 10). Similarly, Felix Guattari presents his idea on ecosophy in terms of modern problems. He presents importance to human subjectivity and psychology where he defines ecosophy as:

Ecosophy is a study of complex phenomena, including human subjectivity, the environment, and social relations, all of which are intimately interconnected.

Without modifications to the social and material environment, there can be no change in mentalities. Here, we are in the presence of a circle that leads me to postulate the necessity of founding an "ecosophy" that would link environmental ecology to social ecology and to mental ecology. (Guattari et al. 15)

Guattari's ecosophy proposes a new way of understanding the relationship between human subjectivity, the environment, and social relations. He argues that these three elements are ultimately interconnected and that our understanding of each one is incomplete without the others. The focus of Guattari's ecosophy is on human subjectivity and its relationship to ecology. He asks how we can find and perceive a relationship with nature that is not based on domination or exploitation. He also argues that the pragmatic approaches of the modern human being are jeopardizing the whole planet and that we need to rethink our relationship with nature. Both Naess and Guattari have highlighted the importance of ecosophy in our efforts to protect the environment. They argue that ecosophy can help us to develop a more sustainable and ethical relationship with nature.

Guattari's philosophical inclination towards human subjectivity and its rationalization on the ethical debate can raise eyebrows about how ecology is against the empire of world capitalism and the productive set machinery revolution of the

postmodern world. The problem according to Guattari is "The social machine, in its capitalist form, has been constructed on the basis of a certain number of segmentations and hierarchizations that have had profound effects on the development of subjectivity. These segmentations and hierarchizations have led to the formation of a number of different subject positions, each with its own specific characteristics. These subject positions are not fixed or immutable but are constantly being transformed in response to changes in the social environment" (Guattari et al. 104).

Throughout the scholarly landscape, numerous scientists, ecologists, and esteemed intellectuals have persistently articulated grave concerns regarding the global predicaments of environmental crises and spiritual impoverishment. These crises are further exacerbated by the eroding symbiotic relationship between nature and culture, an issue that finds expression in various literary compositions. Notably, the field of ecocriticism has emerged as a prominent avenue for critically analyzing literary texts and illuminating the profound interdependence between humanity and the non-human world.

Within this broader academic framework, my research endeavors are dedicated to an in-depth exploration of Jon Krakauer's acclaimed novel, *Into the Wild*. Drawing upon the principles and methodologies of ecocriticism, my investigation revolves around elucidating the novel's ecocritical dimensions and unraveling the intricate interplay between human characters and the natural environment depicted therein. By meticulously dissecting and interpreting the text through an ecocritical lens, my study aims to shed light on the novel's thematic underpinnings, offering valuable insights into the ecological implications embedded within its narrative.

By examining the work within the context of ecocriticism, this research seeks to contribute to the expanding body of knowledge surrounding the intricate relationship

between humans and nature. Furthermore, it aims to elucidate the ways in which literature, particularly *Into the Wild*, serves as a powerful medium for articulating and examining ecological concerns. This rigorous academic endeavor aspires to deepen our understanding of the complex interactions between humanity and the natural world, fostering greater ecological consciousness and promoting a more harmonious coexistence between humans and the environment.

The novel *Into the Wild* by Jon Krakauer has garnered the attention of scholars who have examined it through ecological lenses. In particular, Alexander Menrisky argues that the main character in the novel exhibits a profound ecological consciousness throughout his journey into the wilderness. Chris, the protagonist, grapples with the constraints imposed by his rigid family and lifestyle during his formative years. He yearns for a simpler existence and immersion in nature. According to Menrisky, Chris's actions align with the principles of deep ecology, which emphasize a holistic sense of self extending beyond human boundaries to encompass the non-human world. "Chris's transformative journey commences not with his purchase of a new car but with his refusal to acquire one, rejecting material possessions when his existing vehicle serves its purpose adequately. Subsequently, he progressively sheds his societal identity, relinquishing his money and embracing a sense of belonging to the "biotic community"(Menrisky 101).

While many have interpreted Chris McCandless's journey into the Alaskan wilderness as a transcendentalist quest, others have seen it as a deep ecological one. Kantarjian argues that Chris McCandless's journey into the Alaskan wilderness can be seen as a modern-day deep ecological quest. Like deep ecologists, McCandless believed that humans are not separate from nature, but are part of a larger interconnected web of life. He also rejected the anthropocentric view of the world, which sees humans as the

only important species. Instead, he believed that all life has intrinsic value, regardless of its usefulness to humans.

Kantarjian also notes that McCandless's writings, such as his journal entries, echo the deep ecological philosophy. For example, in one journal entry, McCandless writes, "I have found that I am most content when I am alone in the wilderness, surrounded by nature. It is there that I feel most connected to the universe and to all of its creatures" (Kantarjian 26). Despite these similarities, there are also some important differences between McCandless and deep ecologists. For example, deep ecologists generally believe that humans should live in harmony with nature, while McCandless was more willing to challenge the status quo and live in a more radical way. He also did not have the same level of scientific knowledge as deep ecologists, which led him to make some mistakes that ultimately contributed to his death.

However, Kantarjian argues that McCandless's journey can still be seen as a cautionary tale about the dangers of shallow ecology, which sees nature as a resource to be exploited for human benefit. She writes, "McCandless's story is a reminder that we need to be careful not to lose sight of the intrinsic value of nature, and that we need to find ways to live in harmony with the natural world" (Kantarjian 29).

Jonah Raskin's interpretation of *Into the Wild* offers a unique perspective on the relationship between humans and nature. Raskin argues that Chris McCandless's journey into the Alaskan wilderness was a misguided attempt to escape the constraints of modern society and find redemption in the natural world. However, Raskin also cautions against wholly rejecting socio-cultural practices necessary for everyday life. He emphasizes that McCandless's death was ultimately the result of his inability to sustain himself in the wilderness, which challenges the romanticized notion of nature as a source of salvation.

Raskin states, "Krakauer portrays McCandless's disillusionment with modern civilization and his yearning for the untainted happiness found in the wilderness" (Raskin13). However, Raskin also points out that "it was ultimately McCandless's inability to sustain himself in the wilderness that led to his demise" (Raskin14). This perspective challenges the romanticized notion of the wilderness as a source of salvation, reminding us of the complexities and potential dangers that accompany an idealized pursuit of a purely untamed existence.

Without nature, Homo sapiens is nothing. However, without Homo sapiens on this big blue, nature might most probably thrive. This aforementioned argument can intercept the doctrine, discovery, and decisions encountered by McCandless within Krakauer's *Into the Wild*. Through the poetical and philosophical perception, the life of McCandless echoes his disregard for American Modernity, his aspirations for ecosophy and co-existence, and his last realization of man being a social animal, indeed.

In the context of this thesis, it is essential to acknowledge that *Into the Wild* has already undergone extensive analysis and scrutiny, particularly from the perspective of ecocriticism. Numerous scholars have delved into the novel, exploring its ecological dimensions and shedding light on the intricate relationship between humans and nature that it portrays. However, despite the wealth of existing research, there are still crucial aspects to be explored and understood.

One area of inquiry that merits exploration is the influence of the social, historical, and political context in which the book was written. By situating the narrative within its temporal framework, we can gain a deeper understanding of how these contextual factors shaped the ecological themes present in the novel. Moreover, as *Into the Wild* is based on real events, its connection to the tangible world adds a layer of significance to the application of ecocritical analysis. Additionally, it is crucial to examine the

ramifications that arise when individuals attempt to emulate the protagonist, such as McCandless, and embark on similar journeys into the wilderness. By scrutinizing these consequences, we can gain insights into the broader implications of idealizing a solitary and untamed existence in nature.

This essay will also delve into direct ecocritical issues, including the intricate interplay between nature and culture, the construction of nature as a cultural or linguistic construct, and the transcendental bond between humans and the natural world. By exploring these themes, we can delve into the deeper ecological and philosophical implications presented in the novel, thus contributing to the existing body of ecocritical analysis.

The examination of the relationship between nature and culture holds significant importance in ecocritical readings, a perspective that also applies to Jon Krakauer's *Into the Wild*. In the pursuit of an escape from reality and societal constraints, protagonist Christopher McCandless ventures into the Alaskan wilderness. However, his experience reveals the inescapability of modern society even in remote locations.

"Discarding his map, [McCandless] constructed an idealized notion of the wild that reality could not fulfill. The actual area surrounding the bus that became his shelter, though seemingly remote, did not meet the standards of true wilderness in Alaska. In close proximity to [McCandless's], location lies a major highway to the east, and just sixteen miles north, Denali Park attracts numerous tourists on a daily basis. Notably, within a six-mile radius of [McCandless's] camp, four cabins can be found (Krakauer 103).

This suggests that McCandless' chosen site represents a convergence of culture and nature, blurring the boundaries between the two. Despite the appearance of wilderness, the proximity of society highlights the absence of a clear demarcation that

would allow McCandless to wholly immerse himself in nature.

While nature itself remains a tangible reality, the concept of the wild or wilderness is inherently entwined with human culture. Christopher McCandless constructed an illusion of the wild based on his personal understanding and perception, as simply distancing himself from human society was insufficient to achieve his idealized notion of the wild. Considering not only McCandless' struggle to find untouched natural spaces but also the current state of remaining natural areas on our planet, marked by the imprints of human progress, it becomes increasingly challenging, if not impossible, to separate nature and culture as distinct entities, as they are intricately interconnected in numerous ways.

McCandless' ability to recognize when he had transitioned from society to wilderness relied on his preconceived mental image of what constituted the wild. "He rejected the fraternity and society life his colleagues had, spending his time between his modest off-campus room comprising only milk crate furniture and a mattress on the floor, and the library, where a tutor gave him an out-of-hours access key. He read a lot, learned a lot, but isolated himself from his peers"(Holmes). Despite McCandless' fervent desire to escape society and immerse himself in the wild, he could never fully detach himself from the influences of modern society and culture. "He relied on an abandoned bus for shelter, literature for both entertainment and survival and a rifle for hunting"(Krakauer 83). "Considering that traces of culture and society can be found in virtually every corner of the world, including remote areas unearthed by archaeological discoveries, ecocritics' assertions that pristine, untouched spaces no longer exist on Earth may indeed hold merit"(Barry 153). The idea that there are no longer any truly "untouched" spaces on Earth has been a central tenet of ecocriticism since the field's inception. Ecocritics argue that all literature is environmentally situated and that even

the most "pristine" texts can be seen as reflecting the impact of human culture on the natural world.

Evidence indicates that McCandless' experience in the wilderness was far from idyllic. "However, prior to his demise, McCandless left behind a concise note expressing contentment with his life; a photograph of himself wearing a smile alongside the message was found in the bus" (Krakauer 199). This documentation raises questions regarding whether McCandless underwent a spiritual awakening, discovered solutions to the societal issues he encountered, or achieved a sense of self-actualization, a realization of his true identity. Such assertions lend support to the occasionally problematic idea that nature serves as a panacea or remedy for contemporary problems. Although not necessarily intentional, this perspective can inadvertently contribute to the romanticization and idealization of nature and the wilderness, particularly among individuals who feel unfulfilled in their lives. If McCandless and others who have pursued similar endeavors share this quest for meaning or transcendence, as described by Krakauer and others, it may raise concerns. Such sentiments could reinforce the notion that nature holds the key to resolution, leading individuals to trespass further into the remaining pockets of wilderness in search of these experiences. Consequently, this perspective not only poses risks to those individuals but also poses a threat to nature itself as humans venture deeper into the last remaining wild places. As ecocritics frequently assert, nature has the capacity to influence and be influenced by human activity, rendering the endangerment of nature a simultaneous threat to humanity.

When McCandless' remains were discovered, a highlighted passage from Tolstoy's work appeared in one of his books, stating, "I wanted movement and not a calm course of existence. I wanted excitement and danger and the chance to sacrifice

myself for my love. I felt in myself a superabundance of energy which found no outlet in our quiet life" (Krakauer 15). Krakauer speculates that for McCandless, the Alaskan wilderness provided an opportunity to delve into the depths of his own soul and explore his true essence as a man. His two-year journey can be seen as a preparation for his venture into the wilderness. If McCandless had found a sense of transcendence or if his needs had been fulfilled during this period, he might not have felt compelled to embark on his wilderness odyssey. Maslow's hierarchy of needs can be applied to McCandless' story, suggesting that his unmet esteem needs, such as freedom, strength, and self-actualization, may have driven his desire to test his abilities in the wild.

Regardless of the underlying motivation for his search, McCandless did experience the transcendent emotion, which he described as "remarkably close to terror," in the Alaskan wilderness. "Perhaps in his last days, as his strength ebbed and he lay beneath the stars, he glimpsed the blinding truth--the very thing he had gone to Alaska to find--and realized that all his running had been for naught. There was no escape, no final frontier. He had simply traded one trap for another" (Krakauer 198). McCandless's time in Alaska did not lead him to the realization that he needed to return to society. Instead, it led him to the realization that there is no escape from the human condition. We are all trapped in our own personal wildernesses, and there is no way to find true happiness by running away from our problems. This conclusion aligns with Maslow's concept of self-transcendence, where individuals develop a unitize consciousness with fellow humans and recognize their interconnectedness. McCandless was not the first person to seek answers or solutions in nature and the wilderness. "I thought climbing the Devils Thumb would fix all that was wrong with my life. In the end, of course, it changed almost nothing. But I came to appreciate that mountains make poor receptacles for dreams" (Krakauer 154). Krakauer learned from

his own experience and came to realize that the wilderness cannot solve our problems. This is a valuable lesson for anyone who is considering running away from their problems. The wilderness can be a beautiful and challenging place, but it is not a place to find answers to our deepest questions. This further supports the interlink nature and culture, as humans have gradually distanced themselves from nature.

This perspective becomes even more intriguing when viewed through the lens of Maslow's hierarchy of needs. It suggests that individuals like McCandless may feel that their needs are not adequately met within society, leading them to seek a closer connection to nature. Throughout history, human socialization has been vital for survival, involving the sharing of resources and functioning within groups or small societies for protection and self-preservation. The social nature of humans remains prominent in modern society, where we live and work in communities. Research indicates that face-to-face communication helps regulate stress and anxiety, and overall social interaction releases dopamine, promoting happiness, protecting the brain from neurodegenerative diseases, and preventing mental illnesses."With this in mind, it is unsurprising that both Rosellini and McCandless arrived at the same conclusion: to return to society. McCandless succinctly captured his epiphany with the words, "HAPPINESS ONLY REAL WHEN SHARED" (Krakauer 197). These words were written next to the paragraph stating, "And so it turned out that only a life similar to the life of those around us, merging with it without a ripple, is genuine life, and that an unshared happiness is not happiness. . ." (Krakauer 197). Even Thoreau, one of McCandless' favorite authors, concluded that the wilderness was best suited as a spiritual resource rather than a permanent dwelling, as he discovered during his two-year stay in a cabin.

The correlation, as well as the co-existence between a human being and nature,

can be intercepted from *Into the Wild*. As ecology refers to the ideological and philosophical framework suggesting the co-existence of biotic and abiotic components of nature with the inclusion of *Homo sapiens sapiens*, *Into the Wild* beholds the concepts of ecology, deep ecology, and eco-spirituality as the protagonist aspires his vision or passion or perception through such philosophical portals. The pure passion for nature or the concept of ecology can be reflected in the life of Christopher McCandless as he always and strongly believed that nature conquers all beings as well as nature is the core of existence rather than sophisticated or highly intellectual human beings. Therefore, he moved towards the unforgiving white, green, and blue lands of Alaska in order to exhibit the fundamental truth of existence and the pattern of the ecological model.

The journey *Into the Wild* embarked upon by Christopher McCandless in Jon Krakauer's *Into the Wild* beckons us to explore the profound interplay between humans, nature, and culture. As we reach the culmination of this ecocritical analysis, we are confronted with a resounding realization: our relationship with the environment is not only a subject of intellectual inquiry but a pressing concern that demands our immediate attention.

McCandless' quest for self-discovery and transcendence amidst the untamed Alaskan wilderness resonates deeply within us, drawing us closer to the essence of our own existence. Yet, beneath the allure of his remarkable odyssey lies a complex tapestry woven by the threads of our collective consciousness, a tapestry that intertwines our aspirations, our shortcomings, and our profound interconnectedness with the natural world. In navigating the tumultuous terrain of ecocriticism, we have unearthed profound insights into the intricate dance between humanity and the wild. The romanticized image of untouched nature, once believed to exist in pristine

isolation, crumbles before our eyes, revealing the indelible mark of human presence. We stand on the precipice of a new understanding, a realization that the wild is not merely a distant realm to be conquered, but a reflection of our own cultural footprints and environmental impact. The dichotomy between nature and culture, once perceived as distinct entities, has dissolved under the weight of our analysis. The interplay between humanity and the environment is not a mere intellectual exercise but a pressing concern that demands our attention. The ecocritical perspective has shed light on the intertwined fate of nature and humans, highlighting the profound implications of our actions on the delicate ecological balance of the planet.

The analysis of *Into the Wild* extends beyond the confines of literary discourse, beckoning us to recognize the gravity of our current environmental predicament. The commercialization of nature, the looming specter of global warming, and the voracious appetite for resources threaten not only the delicate balance of ecosystems but also the very essence of our collective well-being. We are confronted with an imperative to bridge the chasm between our aspirations and our actions to honor the interconnectedness of nature and culture and forge a symbiotic relationship that nurtures both. As we draw the threads of this thesis together, we find ourselves at the precipice of a critical juncture, an invitation to redefine our relationship with the environment and chart a new course for the future. The ecocritical analysis of *Into the Wild* serves as both a testament to the power of literature and a call to action. It challenges us to reevaluate our perceptions, transcend the limitations of our cultural constructs, and assume the role of guardians of the natural world.

Krakauer's vivid depiction of McCandless' yearning for self-actualization in the face of unfulfilled societal needs serves as a poignant reminder of the shortcomings of our modern existence. It compels us to question the adequacy of our current social

structures in meeting our fundamental human needs and the subsequent consequences this has on our relationship with the natural world. McCandless' pursuit of authenticity and connection in the wilderness resonates with individuals who feel a sense of disconnection and seek solace in the embrace of nature. Moreover, our analysis has revealed the urgent need to address the environmental challenges we face today. The commercialization of nature, the specter of global warming, and the rapid depletion of natural resources pose significant threats not only to ecosystems but to our own well-being as a species. The ecocritical reading of *Into the Wild* compels us to confront these challenges head-on, fostering a deeper understanding of the interconnectedness of nature, culture, and human experience.

As we conclude this study, we must recognize the transformative power of literature in shaping our perceptions and motivating action. *Into the Wild* serves as both a cautionary tale and a call to arms, urging us to reassess our relationship with the environment and embrace our role as stewards of the Earth. It is through interdisciplinary explorations, such as ecocriticism, that we gain the necessary insights to navigate the complex environmental issues of our time and work towards sustainable solutions.

In essence, the ecocritical analysis of *Into the Wild* illuminates the multifaceted nature of our relationship with the wild, challenging us to transcend narrow dichotomies and forge a more harmonious coexistence. It compels us to recognize that our quest for self-discovery and connection with the natural world must be accompanied by a deep sense of responsibility and a commitment to sustainable practices. As we embark on the next chapter of our collective journey, let us carry the lessons learned from *Into the Wild* into our hearts and minds. May we strive to cultivate a profound appreciation for the intricate web of life, recognizing that our

actions ripple through ecosystems, affecting not only the flora and fauna but also the well-being of future generations? Let us embrace a paradigm shift that moves beyond exploitation and dominance, towards stewardship and reverence for the natural world.

In conclusion, the ecocritical analysis of Jon Krakauer's *Into the Wild* illuminates the complex relationship between humans, nature, and culture. McCandless' journey serves as a catalyst for introspection, inviting us to reflect on our place within the natural world and the profound responsibility we bear as custodians of the Earth. By transcending artificial boundaries and embracing a holistic perspective, we can forge a harmonious coexistence that nurtures both human flourishing and ecological vitality. As we embark on this transformative journey, let us remain steadfast in our commitment to environmental stewardship. Let us honor the interconnectedness of all life forms, embracing the inherent value and resilience of the natural world. By cultivating a deep sense of kinship with nature, we can foster a collective consciousness that transcends individual narratives and fosters a global community dedicated to safeguarding the Earth for present and future generations.

In the words of McCandless himself, "Happiness is only real when shared." Let us share the responsibility of preserving our planet's beauty and ecological richness, working together to forge a future where nature thrives, humanity flourishes, and the wild remains a source of wonder, inspiration, and solace. Only through our collective efforts can we hope to create a world where the harmony between humans and the natural world is restored, and where the legacy we leave behind is one of sustainable coexistence and reverence for all life.

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