
Biographical Discourse of Krakauer's into the Wild

Within the contents of a variety of different biographies, there are multiple similarities between the conventions that are typically used. However, there are also multiple differences between them in their features that set these works apart from one another as well. The author's effectiveness while using these conventions correlate with the reader's enjoyment of the book in this challengingly interesting genre too, all of which is handled exceedingly well in the biography *Into the Wild*, written by Jon Krakauer. While told through a somewhat disjointed yet captivating timeline, Krakauer recounts the life of Chris McCandless during his liberating journey throughout North America, spanning from Chris' childhood to the day he is found dead in the Alaskan wilderness. Throughout the pages of his book, Krakauer conforms to typical conventions of a biography by using original sources and deviates from these conventions by including a unique structure in his chapters as well as an explanation of his own life experiences to further enhance the reader's own experience of reading Chris' story.

First and foremost, the book conforms to typical biographical conventions by retracing Chris' steps with original sources. For example, after interviewing Jim Gallien for information about Chris, Krakauer is able to recapitulate Gallien initially meeting "the hitchhiker [Chris McCandless] standing...thumb raised high, shivering in the gray Alaska dawn" before he drove him further into the Alaskan wilderness, never to be seen alive again (Krakauer 3). For the purpose of building more credibility as the biographer, Krakauer is practically required to interview Chris' family and the people he met on his journey to be more holistic and well-rounded in his research and writing. Furthermore, Krakauer consults the writings of Chris McCandless himself, incorporating his letters and journal entries throughout the entirety of the book. For instance, Krakauer includes the letter to Wayne Westerberg in which Chris writes about finally arriving in the Yukon Territory, proclaiming "I now walk into the wild" (3). Being the titular quote, Krakauer places it in the beginning of the first chapter, emulating Chris' audacious tone and establishing an ominous, foreboding mood for the readers throughout the rest of the chapter and also the rest of the book. Obviously, Krakauer's typical usage of primary sources and materials in order to gather information for this biography enriches the reader's enjoyment as well as his own credibility as a writer.

Contrary to the similarities to other biographies, Krakauer's book deviates from typical conventions by also creating a unique structure within its pages. Most noticeably, relatively simple maps appear before various chapters begin, such as the one that is placed before chapter nine, which depicts the surrounding area of Davis Gulch around the border between Arizona and Utah (86). By including this map, readers can effortlessly visualize the content of the chapter as they are given a basic understanding of Chris' path due to Krakauer's unique

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structural convention that is not seen in most other biographies. In addition to the map on the page before, epigraphs from Chris' letters and other writers' works also serve as equally unique syntax in order to begin each chapter, complementing any image Krakauer aligns with it on the page before. One particular epigraph that emphasizes this is from Everett Ruess, in which he writes "as to when I shall visit civilization, it will not be soon...I have not tired of the wilderness; rather I enjoy its beauty and the vagrant life I lead" in a letter to his brother (87). This refreshing variance from the usual paragraphs seen outlining Chris' story as well as in other books augments the reader's piqued intrigue of the book, as it also serves to juxtapose the philosophies and endeavors of both Chris and Everett Ruess, both of which emphasized various transcendentalist beliefs approximately sixty years apart from one another. Krakauer's intent for including this comparison is to therefore not only highlight the subject matter and message of the chapter, but to also allow readers to draw their own conclusions about Chris' uniqueness as well as with the similarities between the different adventurers. As a result, this book's slight dissimilarity in the genre and structure itself, being almost like a written documentary about Chris, heightens the perpetual interest and captivation of audiences sustained throughout the text.

Likewise, another deviation from usual biographical conventions is Krakauer's apparent authorial bias as he even dedicates a couple of chapters in the book to purely discuss his own experiences. Blatantly confessing "I won't claim to be an impartial biographer" in the Author's Note, Krakauer continues to explain how he related to Chris' story personally, and therefore it made "a dispassionate rendering of the tragedy impossible". By being upfront about his own bias and admiration towards the young explorer, he establishes a foundation of honesty and trust with his readers as they are made aware of his personal connection to the tale they are about to delve into. Later in the book, two chapters are chiefly devoted to Krakauer relating himself to Chris, especially when he describes how in 1977 he aspired "to climb a mountain called The Devil's Thumb" just as Chris also had a certain inclination to travel through wilderness in solitude (134). Accordingly, this unusual convention gives readers Krakauer's authorial perception of Chris' story, specifically projecting and almost analogizing his personal connection with Chris to their different experiences and expeditions in their respective wildernesses. Consequently, this second distinction further supplements the reader's own perception of Chris, the book, and now even Krakauer himself; despite its unorthodox nature, it still bolsters the value of the biography explaining the author's own perspective on Chris McCandless as well.

There are numerous conventions that are used in various biographies and other books with similar genres, each with conceptually overlapping techniques as well as their own exclusively unique features. This being said, Jon Krakauer's method of using biographical conventions in *Into the Wild* is no exception as it details Chris' journey throughout all of North America. Essentially, Jon Krakauer exponentially enhances his intriguing biography of Chris by using

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conventions such as utilizing primary sources to gather information, formulating a unique structure within each chapter, and including his own personal experiences as he relates to Chris McCandless himself.

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