
Wilderness and Its Influence on American Imagination in "Into the Wild"

Even from the humble beginnings of modern Western society, the wilderness has gripped the collective imagination of Americans. Through Manifest Destiny and, more recently, expansion into the American Northwest, modern minds have been captured by the allure of the wilderness. Jon Krakauer is no different. After learning of the death of Christopher McCandless, Krakauer writes a quick article on the unfortunate demise. His work soon becomes his passion as Krakauer composes a nonfiction narrative on the adventure that ultimately led to the downfall of McCandless. In his narrative, Krakauer drifts from traditional transcendentalist writing through the utilization of concrete rather than the abstract diction often found in transcendentalist literature. Although initial perceptions of Krakauer's objective revolve around the description of McCandless's mortality, a truer purpose lies in the exploration of why American minds are so captivated by the wilderness.

Often, Krakauer crafts dramatic shifts in tone to represent the affect nature has on one's mind. When writing of his excursion onto Devil's Thumb, Krakauer begins his ascent with a distant tone generated by the dry diction of "catwalk," "rock prow," and "thereby execute" (141). The use of such technical diction emphasizes the initial sentiment felt by Krakauer that the climb was merely a means for later boasting and held no emotional connection. In contrast, after the "climb goes on (142)" Krakauer becomes closer with nature, and the tone of the writing becomes more personal with the inclusion of "stirs in your chest," "I felt," and "chutzpah" (143). This shift from distant to personal tone indicates nature's ability to transform the perspective of the mind and reflects one reason why nature captivates Americans.

Moreover, Krakauer argues that such effect can only be captured through nature. For example, while on the summit of Devil's Thumb, Krakauer forms a satisfied tone as he describes how his "cracked lips stretch[ed] into a painful grin" (153). This joyful tone is lost as Krakauer attempts to reintegrate into civilization at Wrangle Narrows. As a result, the tone of his writing becomes depressed with somber diction including "mumbled," "lurched," and "gutted" (155). This use of grim tone is a stark antithesis with the elated and satisfied diction utilized to describe the time spent on the summit and signifies that nature is the sole place for contentment and transformation.

Krakauer also employs concrete and specific diction to demonstrate the tangibility and exactness that the wilderness holds. For instance, while describing his arrival at the site where McCandless began his Alaskan journey, Krakauer represents the scene through concrete

Need help with the assignment?

Our professionals are ready to assist with any writing!

GET HELP

diction including “river,” “snowpack,” “water,” and “rocks” (173). The adoption of concrete diction indicates Krakauer’s view that the wilderness is a physical entity and not the abstract idea that propagates in the imagination of Americans as a distant being only available to those without ties to civilization. In conjunction with concrete, Krakauer focuses on specific diction to depict nature through the use of “Alaska Range,” “Dan Solie,” “California,” and “Stampede Trail” (173). The specific nature of the diction used represents the definite quality of the wilderness and exhibits Krakauer’s notion that nature and the wilderness are precise concepts that are unique to one place. This idea articulates the premise that, to achieve the benefits that nature offers, one must venture into its unfounded beauty.

Found in each chapter, scene descriptions take a prominent place in the overall structure and indicate a return to transcendentalist ideology. Most noticeably, at the beginning of chapters, Krakauer utilizes extended depictions of the surroundings. At the opening of chapter two, Krakauer describes the Alaska Range as containing “a boggy amalgam of muskeg, alder thickets, and veins of scrawny spruce” (10). This description continues for three paragraphs more and speaks to importance of nature as well as signals the return to a transcendentalist thought previously lost through concrete diction. Krakauer’s emphasis on the physical aspects of the wilderness further reflect on the high view Krakauer holds of it. This view is explored more deeply with the inclusion of an excerpt by wilderness writer Roderick Nash which posits that “wilderness created a perfect setting for melancholy or exultation” (157). The addition of this excerpt by Krakauer displays the preeminence of nature’s ability to transform thought through its physical setting.

Many times, Krakauer opts for figurative language to detail the allure of the wilderness. When describing the Detrital Wash, Krakauer writes that the air raised from the earth “like bubbles from the bottom of a boiling kettle” (27). This use of simile relates the almost incomprehensible awe of the untamed wild to the lay public, only knowing the pedestrian nature of a boiling kettle. Such a simplification of the complex beauty that resides in nature demonstrates the disconnect between the people that inhabit civilization and the true wonder that is found in the wilderness. In addition, Krakauer employs personification of the wilderness in his portrayal of the Strait of Georgia where the “slopes rose precipitously ... bearded in a gloom of hemlock and cedar” (136). With this humanization of the wild, Krakauer validates nature’s ability to draw himself, and other Americans, into it with its siren call. Furthermore, Krakauer establishes the attraction of the wilderness through the imagery utilized when he and McCandless’s parents are departing the wild. Krakauer paints the image of nature’s quiet being “shattered by the percussive racket of the helicopter” (203). This formation of imagery exemplifies the ultimate solace and tranquility held in the wilderness that civilization cannot produce and posits that civilization is, instead, merely a percussive racket that shatters the offerings of the wilderness.

Throughout his narrative, Krakauer explores the grip that wilderness has on the American

Need help with the assignment?

Our professionals are ready to assist with any writing!

GET HELP

imagination without relying on the abstract diction used by orthodox transcendentalist literature, but rather through concrete alternatives. Nevertheless, Krakauer determines that the human-like draw of the wilderness fills the disconnect between nature and civilization with ultimate solace and tranquility. Moreover, Krakauer establishes that the power of the wilderness exists in its physical attributes, and by doing so, identifies nature's unique ability to transform the minds of those who venture into the wild.

gradesfixer.com

Need help with the assignment?

Our professionals are ready to assist with any writing!

GET HELP