
Paternal Symbols in Jon Krakauer's "Into the Wild"

"Each day mankind and the claims of mankind slipped farther from him. Deep in the forest a call was sounding, and as often as he heard this call, mysteriously thrilling and luring, he felt compelled to turn his back upon the fire, and to plunge into the forest..." (London 33). With statements such as this, Jack London's *Call of the Wild* epitomizes the inner urging of freedom and control that come from embracing nature and abandoning societal ideals. Depicting the innate call Buck has to abandon mankind, Jack London shows Buck's revelation that causes him to reject modern society in place of living freely with the Alaskan world of nature. Buck submits to his primordial desire and calling to the wilderness in Alaska rather than reverting to living as a domesticated dog in the hands of a human owner. Learning to adapt and embrace nature and the wild proved to be Buck's true call to freedom and happiness for himself. Like Buck, Chris McCandless, the nonconformist depicted in *Into the Wild*, also found a calling in nature and learned to adapt to living alone within the confines of the wilderness, believing happiness arises from living simply. Contrary to Buck, who was initially forced into this decision, Chris made the choice on his own to reject authority figures and modern society, motivated by both his resentment for his father and his lack of freedom in everyday settings. In *Into the Wild*, John Krakauer illustrates how Chris McCandless' relationship with his controlling father led him to resent and condemn authoritative figures later in his life.

In his childhood, Chris often felt suppressed and enraged due to the authority of his father; in fact, Chris visibly showed signs of annoyance and anger with his father, often bitterly submitting to his father's demands. While hiking a mountain together, Walt dictated that Chris stop after a certain while, "but Chris wanted to keep going to the top. I told him no way. He was only twelve then, so all he could do was complain" (Krakauer, 109). Walt's assertiveness deeply contrasted the innate free-spiritedness of Chris, as Krakauer shows with this example. Krakauer exhibits to the reader that this was one of many experiences in Chris' childhood in which Chris' requests to his father were met with harsh refusals and restrictions, leading Chris to complain and eventually suffer silently. Domineering and assertive, Walt presented constant rejections to Chris's requests that led Chris to learn how to cope with not having any control, further leading Chris to suppress his visible rage: "Chris submitted to Walt's authority through high school and college to a surprising degree, but the boy raged inwardly all the while" (Krakauer, 64). Krakauer offers this statement to show how Chris later allowed himself to be controlled, visibly showing no signs of resistance to his father's domineering persona. While showing no apparent signs, Chris possessed a deep contempt and deep-rooted grudge against his father, psychologically alienating him from Walt while also leading him to condemn similar forms of authority. After Chris's childhood morphed into adulthood, he began to find more reasons to resent his father, not just for his controlling persona, but now his for moral character as well:

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"After Chris unearthed the particulars of Walt's divorce, two years passed before his anger began to leak to the surface, but leak it eventually did. The boy could not pardon the mistakes his father had made as a young man" (Krakauer, 122). His already firm animosity towards his father only hardened once he found another reason to condemn Walt. Due to this, Chris not only had contempt for his father's authoritativeness but also zero respect for his father as well, eventually losing respect altogether for authoritative figures.

As a result of Walt's restrictiveness, Chris later exhibits resentment and defiance towards authority figures when embarking on his journey. In this defiance to authority figures, Chris completely abandons any ideology that doesn't fit into his core belief in total autonomy and freedom. When questioned about his name, Chris, rejecting his previous identity, responds, "Just Alex" (Krakauer, 4). By refusing to acknowledge his birth-given name, Chris shows his defiance to the identity his parents forcefully put upon him, even though it was simply just a name. Eventually, Chris begins to show his defiance of any law which he feels hinders his freedom, as shown when Chris adamantly exclaims "Hell no" in response to whether he possesses a hunting license, also mentioning, "How I feed myself is none of the government's business. F*ck their stupid rules" (Krakauer, 6). By exclaiming this, Chris shows complete disregard and disdain towards the government, viewing accepted laws as "stupid rules" infringing upon his privacy and freedom. Subsequently, Chris, resenting the authority of his parents, outright rejects his parents' offer to buy him a car, stating that he couldn't "believe they'd try and buy me a car " (Krakauer, 29). Thus, Chris exposes his feelings of disgust for their action, perceiving it as a bribe to secure his respect. By vocalizing his beliefs along these lines in his letter, Chris again characterizes the authority figures as manipulative and controlling, asserting that they infringe upon his trust and independence.

In *Into the Wild*, John Krakauer depicts how Chris McCandless' relationship with his authoritative and restraining father led Chris to harbor strong feelings of defiance and resentment towards authority figures. Whether parents deny their children independence or refuse to allow them to be free, raising children in an authoritarian household can lead to detrimental consequences not only for the child's life but also for the child's mental stability. A survey conducted a few years ago concluded that kids raised with punitive discipline and controlling parents have tendencies towards anger and defiance (University of New Hampshire, 2012). This was the case with Chris McCandless, who while growing under his father's restrictive household gained extreme feelings of resentment and contempt for both his father and the controlling aspects of society in general. Thus, by showing the effects of authoritarian parenting, Krakauer shows the reader why Chris craved that independence and freedom to the point where he yearned to live alone in the Alaskan wilderness. A transformation epitomized by the emotions of anger, resentment, and contempt illustrates to the reader how Chris' emotions were the main perpetrator in his push to live with nature, a decision which proved fatal later on.

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