Persuasion and Literature

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McCandless’ Death

In *Into the Wild* by Jon Krakauer, a youthful man undermines his life by journeying into the Alaskan Wilderness alone with minimal supplies. As a result of his vigorous experiences, Chris McCandless loses his life. When studying or hearing his story, many people claim that McCandless was a nut case for even starting to believe that he could survive in the Alaskan bush, let alone under his circumstances. It has been argued that his journey was one of courage, to become completely self-reliant and free from the expectations of society. However, many people start out into the Alaskan wilderness believing they are destined to find greatness and new wonders, that all their sorrows will go away and their goals be achieved, to find that it is artificial to the reality of their situations. If one is to journey out into the wilderness for any purpose whatsoever, then it is only common sense to train beforehand and to have proper knowledge and supplies. McCandless, on the other hand, read up on the Alaskan wilderness a few times, including a book on plant types, and denied almost all extra supplies given to him by companions. I agree with the Krakauer’s argument in *Into the Wild* that Chris McCandless should be responsible and blamed for his own death due to his ignorance to prepare for his journey, including the minimal knowledge of the land obtained beforehand, as well as his secretive nature which deemed his rescue even more unlikely.

Chris McCandless set himself up for death in not properly preparing. If an individual is planning on going into the wilderness alone to survive for a long period of time, it would only be common sense to be well prepared and to obtain the appropriate type and amount of supplies. McCandless enters the Alaskan bush with only the bare necessities. Bringing only a rifle, simple clothes and toiletries, books, a pound bag of right, and a green canteen for over a month’s trip into the completely uninhabited regions of Alaska was not wise on his part. Gallien, a man who gave McCandless a ride into the bush, claimed that, “Alex’s backpack looked as though it weighed only twenty-five to thirty pounds, which struck Gallien—an accomplished hunter and woodsman—as an improbably light load for a stay of several months in the backcountry, especially in the Spring” (Krakauer 4). For this man who had advanced outdoor experiences in the harsh conditions of Alaska to claim that McCandless did not have near enough supplies, can only go to show the young mam’s amateur preparations. Anyone who journeys into the wilderness can enter a potentially life-threatening environment, in which it is common sense to be properly prepared in order to survive. However, McCandless disregarded this basic knowledge, ultimately leading to his death. Whether it was his kind nature or his ignorance, McCandless denied supplies offered to him by Gallien and others as well. If he had not known the dangers he was to endure on his journey, the least he could have done was to take the advice and offers from his companions, however he choose not to.

McCandless was responsible for his death in that he did not have any proper knowledge of the land that he was going to survive off for multiple weeks, nor did he try considerably hard to find out. It is commonsense that the Alaskan wilderness is a cold, brutal place in which Mother Nature is not kind to most beings. While the scenery is the most breathtaking and self-inspiring, it does not make up for the fact that the elements will take one’s life if they are not properly prepared. McCandless read Alaskan guide books here and there, as well as carried a book of edible plants, however this was not near enough for the journey he was attempting to take. It could be said that the young man walked straight into the valley of death when he began to venture down the Stampede Trail with only a general map, “The only navigation aid in his possession was a tattered state road map he’d scrounged at a gas station” (5). With only a road map, McCandless had no knowledge of the trail’s location and aspects, as well as what the elements on the trail might have been like during that season. Any sane person would have been more aware of the conditions and where they were headed, let alone when into unknown, uninhabited territory. Many native Alaskans argued that McCandless was yet another young, ignorant being who was to die during his adventures in the bush due to his own idiocy in the aspects of such a journey. At most he could have prepared for his journey more extensively, for the knowledge could have saved his life, “When McCandless tried to walk out of the bush one year ago the previous week, the basket was in the same place it is now, on his side of the canyon. If he’d known about it, crossing the Teklanika to safety would have been a trivial matter. Because he had no topographic map, however, he had no way of conceiving that salvation was close at hand” (174). Had McCandless been fully prepared, including researching the land and carrying appropriate maps, he could have saved his own life. A basket that could have carried him across the river to civilization was only a mile or so from his location when he attempted to cross again one day. Had he done the research and obtained the map, McCandless could have walked down the stream and crossed in the basket. His reluctance to properly prepare ultimately led him to being stuck in the bush until his death.

McCandless’ secretive nature prevents him from receiving help during his months spent struggling to survive. Before starting his journey, Chris McCandless changes his name only making it harder for his friends, family, or any concerned being to find or get in touch with him, “To symbolize the complete severance form his previous life, he even adopted a new name. No longer would he answer to Chris McCandless; he was now Alexander Supertramp, master of his own destiny” (23). Although this might have served to help him achieve his goal of becoming completely self-reliant and finding true happiness, it only separated him farther from any help that civilization could have offered during his time of death. Even if it was as simple as a local knowing his real name, that would at least allow someone to know somewhat of his location in the wilderness when he disappeared, as well as when the police became involved. By changing his name, McCandless completely created a new identity, making it almost impossible for his family to find him, “…loaded up his car, and vanished from their lives. From then on he scrupulously avoided contacting either his parents or Carine…” (125). If he had stayed in contact with them, they might have realized his extended time there and gone out in search of him. His family might’ve even been able to stop him from such a wild excursion, or at least convince him to bring the correct supplies and company. By changing his name, McCandless made sure that no one could easily track him. Walking miles into the Alaskan bush alone with only few knowing your identity and location left him with even a slimmer chance of surviving. By not keeping in touch with his family and friends, McCandless led himself to become isolated in the wilderness to die.

The author is arguing how McCandless’ ignorance leads him to his own death, in which there is no one else to blame. He rejected almost all help offered to him by locals, friends, and family, as well as refused to be accompanied by another being, let alone bring more supplies. Many people along McCandless’ journey, leading up until his last venture onto the Stampede Trail, attempted to talk him out of it or to at least be properly prepared. He disregarded most of the offers or pleads, including from his family. McCandless is responsible for his own death due his abundance of self-confidence and ignorance to others’ help and reality. In his eyes, the journey was one of becoming self-reliant and becoming detached from society, as well as finding happiness. However true this may be, McCandless became arrogantly blinded by these aspects that drove his expedition, ultimately leading him to his death.