

Tribhuvan University

Objectification of Nature in Jon Krakauer's *Into the Wild*

A Thesis Submitted to the Department of English, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences,
Ratna Rajya laxmi Campus, Tribhuvan University in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirement for
the Degree of Master of Arts

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October 2018

Declaration

I hereby declare that the research paper entitled, “Objectification of Nature in Jon Krakauer's

Into the Wild” carries my own original words and

information. As a Master’s student at the Department of English at

Ratna Rajyalaxmi Campus, regular supervision and guidance

from the expert are duly acknowledged.

All sources used for the thesis have been fully and properly cited. It contains no

material which to a substantial extent has been accepted for the award of any

other degree at Tribhuvan University or any other educational institution.

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October 2018

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Letter of Approval

This thesis entitled "Objectification of Nature in Jon Krakauer's *“Into the Wild”* is submitted to the Department of English, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Ratna Rajyalaxmi Campus by Bijay Parajuli and has been approved by the undersigned members of the Research Committee:

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Acknowledgements

I am indebted to a number of people for their help in this project. At first, I express my deepest gratitude to my supervisor, Mr. Janak Paudel, Ratna Rajyalaxmi Campus, Tribhuvan University, for his guidance, advice, criticism, encouragements, and insights throughout the research. His willingness to motivate me contributed tremendously in this research for its completion.

Thanks are also due to Mr. Pradip Sharma, Head of the Department of English, for his friendly presence and approval of this research work in its present shape. Similarly, words cannot express my gratitude toward respected faculty members at the department for their feedbacks, insights, and valuable suggestions.

Finally, I want to express my regards and gratitude to my parents for their constant and lifelong support and encouragement. I am also grateful to all my friends who have been there for me through all the vicissitudes and helped me to complete this project directly and indirectly. Innovative Computer Institute also deserves gratitude for its typing and other technical support.

October 2018

Bijay Parajuli

Abstract

Humanity's relationship with nature has, in recent years, undoubtedly been one of contention and turmoil, an issue which has already gained popularity in popular culture, film and, especially, nature writing. This work examines Jon Krakauer's *Into the Wild*, a biography-cum-travelogue about the real life and death of Christopher McCandless, in terms of environmentalism. Through close examination of the ways in which the text portrays nature and its exploitation by using the views and philosophy of different ecofeminists, it is observed that McCandless takes nature as an object. He underestimates the power of nature and uses it as a means to his own ends. For him, nature is a source of pleasure and adventure. Through inspection of the text's protagonist, Christopher McCandless, and his anthropocentric attitude to nature, we are able to explore why and how the wilderness or the nature is objectified in *Into the Wild*, in particular and all around the globe, in general.

Table of Contents

Chapter I: Introduction	1
Ecofeminists against Objectification of Nature	
Chapter II: Analysis	16
Objectification of Nature by Christopher McCandless	
Conclusion: Nature is not meant to be possessed	24
Works Cited:	27

Introduction:

The genre of nature writing has produced many literary works that revolve around the theme of escapism. There seems to be a need for men and women to escape the consumer society and the longing to find resolution and quietness in nature. Nature as a medium has allowed especially women to go back to their roots to find their inner source of power again. The experience of women drawn to the wilderness is different from that of men. Men, in this genre, are mostly portrayed as the conquering male stereotype who seek adventure in nature. Jon Krakauer once said about climbing the Mount Everest that “getting to the top of the mountain was considered much less important than how one got there: prestige was earned by tackling the most unforgiving routes with minimal equipment, in the boldest style imaginable” (Krakauer 20). Male wilderness memoirs and non-fiction literature, such as *Into The Wild* (1996) and *Into Thin Air* (1997) by John Krakauer, are focused on an adventure in nature and the need to conquer it. The reasons for women to go into the wilderness are therefore different than they are for men. Women have sought the refuge of the deep wilderness to escape but most importantly to heal.

In April 1992, Christopher McCandless, a Romantic and idealistic young nature enthusiast, sent a short postcard to Wayne Westerberg, a friend and former employer. The postcard is both a greeting and a declaration, a medium for McCandless to announce his great adventure, a stupid yet courageous attempt to reclaim notions of masculinity while allowing himself to be a part of nature, rather than the oppressor of nature. The last two sentences of this short message are touching and prophetic: “If this adventure proves fatal and you don’t ever hear from me again, I want you to know you are a great man. I now walk into the wild” (Krakauer 69). By August that same year, McCandless was dead. McCandless marks the growing crises

in both conservation and masculinity by showing the link between men and nature. His life argues that a man needs adventure, and that adventure must come in the wild, because it is within the wild that we see clear connections between conceptions of gender and nature. Jon Krakauer's *Into The Wild* displays the imbalance between social ecological practices and cultural conceptions of gender.

This research revolves around the ecofeminist and ecocritical study of Jon Krakauer's *Into The Wild*. It focuses mostly on ethical perspectives on the interconnections among women, nonhuman animals, and nature. This research will explore the issues like people's instrumental attitude to nature and their treatment of nature.

Christopher McCandless falls in love with the nature. He seems largely discontent with the worldly things, relationship and the capitalistic society. He prefers nature to culture; however he slaughters and shoots the wild creatures that are a part of the nature. In the name of showing his preference over the natural phenomena, he disturbs and imbalances nature. In fact, he tries to objectify the nature, he treats nature as an object the way patriarchal society treats women as an object. His actions don't justify his so called love to nature. Any reader can sense social hypocrisy in this text in which the main character takes nature as granted and does not respect the autonomy of nature. He takes nature as a means of healing his internal and emotional wound, and of adventurous activities. Unfortunately, his lack of preparation and knowledge of his surroundings and insufficient equipment (he did not even have a map or a compass) leads to his death. His negligence can be seen as his disrespect to the wilderness. Due to the evidences of the protagonist's mistreatment of nature, it can be said that the text is full of environmental concerns. In this regard, "eco-feminism" would be a great perspective to achieve the objective of this research. The limitation

of the research is that it will not touch the debate of other aspects apart from the ecology and its objectification. Especially the eye of ecofeminism and, to some extent, ecocriticism is exploited as the major tools to achieve the objective of this research.

This research attempts to unearth the possible answers to the questions that are related to the instrumentalization of nature. The most significant question to address here is why the writer is focusing on McCandless' obsession with nature? In spite of McCandless' fascination towards nature and the wilderness, why does he kill different creatures? Why and how does he use nature as a means to his ends? The human nature relationship is very delicate. The nature is undoubtedly the source of all kinds of creations however people violate and exploit it for various reasons among which consumerism and the search for one's identity is the major motive.

Initially, "eco-feminism" referred generically to a wide variety of "women-nature" connections. A feminist issue provides ways of understanding, eliminating and creating alternatives to the oppression of women. Similarly, the issue of eco-feminism helps to understand how and why the injustice done to women is similar to that of unjustified exploitation of nature.

Ecofeminism uses the basic feminist tenets of equality between genders, a revaluing of non-patriarchal or nonlinear structures, and a view of the world that respects organic processes, holistic connections, and the merits of intuition and collaboration. To these notions, ecofeminism adds both a commitment to the environment and an awareness of the associations made between women and nature. Specifically, this philosophy emphasizes the ways both nature and women are treated by patriarchal society. Ecofeminists examine the effect of gender categories in order to demonstrate the ways in which social norms exert unjust dominance over women

and nature. Those norms produce an incomplete view of the world. We need an alternative worldview that values the earth as sacred, recognizes humanity's dependency on the natural world, and embraces all life as valuable. Plumwood elaborates:

Ecofeminism is a movement that sees a connection between the exploitation and degradation of the natural world and the subordination and oppression of women. It emerged in the mid-1970s along side second-wave feminism and the green movement. Ecofeminism brings together elements of the feminist and green movements, while at the same time offering a challenge to both. It takes from the green movement a concern about the impact of human activities on the non-human world and from feminism the view of humanity as gendered in ways that subordinate, exploit and oppress women. (1993, 87)

Ecofeminism is not necessarily a form of literary criticism. Therefore, I would like to combine it with an ecological theory that is rooted in literature: ecocriticism. Ecocriticism deals with the application of ecological concepts to literary texts. There are many different explanations to what ecocriticism in literature might entail. William Rueckert was the first one to use the term 'ecocriticism' in his essay "Literature and Ecology" (1978). He argues that ecocriticism is "the application of ecology and ecological concepts to the study of literature" (Rueckert 107). Ecocriticism includes a "triple-allegiance to the scientific study of nature, the scholarly analysis of critical representations, and the political struggle for more sustainable ways of inhabiting the natural world" (Heise 506). Glotfelty and Fromm explain that ecocriticism is not only "the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment" but it also "takes as its subject the interconnections

between nature and culture, specifically the cultural artifacts of language and literature” (xviii-xix). They state that ecocritics ask questions such as:

How is nature represented in this sonnet? What role does physical setting play in a novel? How do metaphors of the land influence the way we treat it? How can we characterize nature writing as a genre? Do men write about nature differently than women? How has the concept of wilderness changed over time? In what ways has literacy itself affected humankind’s relationship to the natural world? What bearing might the science of ecology have on literary studies? How is science itself open to literary analysis? (xviii-xix)

These questions help scholars analyze literary works in the light of ecocriticism, but in a way these questions also complicate the relationship between nature and literature because it offers a broad spectrum of analysis.

Ecocriticism has been described as an interdisciplinary field of studies. Catrin Gersdorf and Sylvia Mayer’s book states that we need to further develop ecocriticism as a methodology by re-examining “the history of ideologically, aesthetically, and ethically motivated conceptualizations of nature”. They have also stated that “the function of its constructions and metaphorisations in literary and other cultural practices” need to be taken into consideration. They argue that we need to look at “the potential effects these discursive, imaginative constructions have on our bodies as well as our natural and cultural environments” (10). Robert Kern (2003), on the other hand, states that “ecocriticism, ultimately a form of environmental advocacy, is primarily a critical and literary tool”. It is “a kind of reading designed to expose and facilitate analysis of a text’s orientation both to the world it imagines and to the world in which it takes shape” (260). Thus, the importance of nature has been dealt with

extensively in literature. These ideas about nature in general and nature in literature are also rooted in Krakauer's *Into The Wild*.

Into the Wild deals with the life and death of Christopher Johnson McCandless, a man from a good family who inexplicably turned his back on everything. He graduated from Emory University in 1990, lost no time in giving away the sizeable balance of his bank account to charity. He then abruptly abandoned everything and the personal identity planning to go to Alaska. He anticipated that his parents would want to stop him, so he arranged to have his mail held for at least a month before it was returned to them, thereby giving himself ample time to leave for unknown parts unhindered by parental intervention. Although he had been outwardly obedient and cordial toward his parents, McCandless seemed to have been inexplicably angry with them for a long time. He immediately set out on a meandering adventure. He spent two years throughout the western United States before entering the wilds of Alaska unprepared and starving to death. While his family searched for him in vain, he traveled across the United States, plunged into wilderness, and eventually died.

Into the Wild is very much the story of a young man, of his energy, his idealism, and the arrogance that ultimately kills him. Christopher McCandless denounces and rejects what he sees as American materialism, in general when he leaves his parents and the upper middle-class suburban setting in which they raised him, and very specifically and concretely when he donates all his savings to charity, abandons his car in the desert, and actually burns his paper money on the desert floor. *Into the Wild* asks its readers how close they can come to the mystery of nature, which apparently cares nothing for human beings, and whether nature can be

considered beautiful, given that its primary aspect is inhuman or even opposed to human life.

For Elaine Yee, travel is one of the main social conventions in America, but hypocrisy is the key word which rules Krakauer's texts. Travels are rooted in the American tradition; they are arranged by the family, and the people concerned have no choice. Social pressure and social rules lead to the failure of travels but since divorce is not allowed, people still have to live with each other. Yee views:

As a consequence, the characters experience alienation, and the terrible pressure (analyzed above) children are subjected to, generally has its roots in failed travels. For example, in *Into the Wild*, narrator's parents are not close to each other at first. They are both locked in their own problems. But it is the only text in which there is an improvement, probably because it is a text for travelers. (4)

McCandless tries hunting, not very successfully. He lives off the land, but the land is a zero-tolerance system. William Rueckert claims:

The conceptual and practical problem is to find the grounds upon which the two communities- the human, the natural- can coexist, cooperate, and flourish in the biosphere. All of the most serious and thoughtful ecologists...have tried to develop ecological visions which can be translated into social, economic, political ,and individual programs....All this may seem rather remote from creating, reading, teaching, and writing about literature; but in fact, it is not. I invoke here...the first Law of Ecology: 'Everything is connected to everything else.' (27)

Like mountains, deserts in *Into the Wild* function primarily as means for McCandless to challenge himself, and as such, they illustrate his hubris. Not only does he fear the desert insufficiently; he behaves as though it has been put there purely in order to test his competence. The moose that he shoots and then, heartbreakingly, fails to preserve shows it.

In the name of preserving nature people often deliberately demolish it. They treat nature as an object so that they can exploit and extract benefits out of it. However, this attitude to nature causes precarious situations and devastating effects. Plumwood notes:

The inferiorisation of human qualities and aspects of life associated with necessity, nature and women—of nature-as-body, of nature-as passion or emotion, of nature as the pre-symbolic, of nature-as primitive, of nature-as-animal and of nature as the feminine—continues to operate to the disadvantage of women, nature and the quality of human life. The connection between women and nature and their mutual inferiorisation is by no means a thing of the past, and continues to drive, for example, the denial of women's activity and indeed of the whole sphere of reproduction. (1993, 21)

Natural sites are taken as source of refreshment and pleasure, but their preservation is not the concern of human. They take mountains as an obstacle and want to conquer it test their capability and character.

Chapter I: Ecofeminists against Objectification of Nature

Ecofeminism is concerned with analyzing the relationship between women and nature in the light of male oppression. Ecofeminism as a movement emerged in North America and Europe in the 1970s. It is a part of 'green theory' and therefore focused on issues related to ecology. Ecofeminism has been perceived as a movement that links ecology with feminism. In a way, it is often seen as a combination of the two important contemporary movements. Ecofeminists draw upon the "deep ecological theory to the extent that they conceptualize human relations with 'nature' as a form of domination" (Cudworth 101). These ecofeminists are frequently perceived as either women who are feminists or feminists who are focused on the environment (McGuire and McGuire 1991). Yet many ecofeminists have argued that ecofeminism is not simply "a subset of feminism or ecology," and they have stated that "in many respects [it is] meta-feminism," which offers "a distinct and more broadened methodology for understanding the world" (McGuire and McGuire 1991). Ecofeminism is therefore seen as "an insight" or an "exposition of current problems" and sometimes it has even been perceived as "an eco-political strategy" (Eaton 2). However, the approach they all have in common is that they all focus on the environment dominated by a male-centered society.

Erika Cudworth raises the concern that much of the problem with human domination as well as ecological domination is that we do not think of people, animals, or natural objects as possessing value outside of what they can do for us. She writes, "The most common basis for an environmental ethics is an argument for 'intrinsic value', according to which natural objects and species are seen to have value in themselves rather than having value in terms of their functions for other things"(19). This may seem an oversimplified solution, but based on the evidence by

McCandless' dismissive attitude toward the landscape, it is clear that Western tendency values nature as 'good' only in proportion to the 'good' it does you.

Cudworth discusses the problem of assuming an inherent difference based on binary opposites, conceptualizing domination on three levels of dominatory formations and practices of power which are *marginalization*, *exploitation*, and *oppression*. She claims, "These formations and practices are predicated on difference" (7). In simple terms, she describes oppression as "a harsh degree of relations of dominatory power", exploitation refers to "the use of something as resources for the ends of the user", and marginalization as "the making and conceptualizing of something as relatively insignificant" (7). All of these terms are recognized as referring to humans, animals, and nature.

Ecofeminists argue that the main cause of the issues concerning women and nature is male dominance. Men are often seen as superior to women in western society, even so as culture is often perceived as being superior to nature. In general, humans view themselves as superior to the natural environment and patriarchy is seen, according to Plumwood, as the "villain behind the ecological crisis" (1993, 11).

Women are culturally tied to nature according to the ecofeminists. The oppression of women and its connection to nature is stated in many traditional sources, but these are hardly ever positive (Plumwood 19). Edmund Burke stated that "A woman is but an animal and an animal not of the highest order" (qtd. in Morgan 187). Jonathan Swift said that "I cannot conceive of you to be human creatures, but a sort of species hardly a degree above a monkey" (qtd. in Morgan 191). Sigmund Freud wrote that "Women represent the interests of the family and sexual life; the work of civilization has become more and more men's business" (qtd. in Morgan 80).

These comments are misogynistic and the connection these men make between nature and women are quite superficial. Nature in this case is a problematic concept because it can refer to so many different things. Plumwood states that the term 'nature' is a contrast to reason as it "includes the emotions, the body, the passions, animality, the primitive or uncivilised, the non-human world, matter, physicality and sense experience, as well as the sphere of irrationality, of faith and of madness" (1993, 19-20). This shows that nature is more of an umbrella term that includes a set of different aspects.

The origin of this social domination is obscure and ambiguous. What we do know is that social domination is "at the core of civilizations that are patriarchal" (Eaton 41). This androcentric world view indirectly creates a society in where women receive "less education than men, [...] are given to their husbands or take their husbands' name in marriage, receive lesser salaries for equivalent job, [and] choose predominantly caring professions rather than political careers" (Eaton 39). Women are perceived as homemakers and are considered to be "mothers by nature" (Eaton 39). Women were steered towards work in the sphere of "nature- the home- where their caring, emotions and body (pregnancy, breastfeeding and child-rearing) are central" (Eaton 39). This role of women as mothers in western society is often compared to the role of nature in society. Even though mothers are the homemakers of a house, they are also perceived as invisible in the framework of the family. This is often compared with the invisibility of nature in society. As Plumwood notes, "In a cultural society, the mother is background to her child and his/her father" (1993, 22). The social skills she teaches her child is merely the background to real learning, which is defined as part of the male sphere of reason and knowledge. This relates to invisibility of nature because nature is merely viewed as the 'environment' in relation

to humans. The natural world is viewed as feminine and is background to society and humanity which are viewed as masculine. The oppression of nature starts with anthropocentrism where humans place themselves above the natural world. The oppression goes a bit further by linking it to female oppression by male society.

Plumwood argues that this idea of feminine traits linked to nature is what sets ecofeminists apart from feminists. This creates a point of friction between feminism and ecofeminism. Feminists state that this feminine connection with nature is “regressive and insulting” (1993, 20). Plumwood states that feminists “view the traditional connection between women and nature as no more than an instrument of oppression, a relic of patriarchy” and that now this issue has been brought to light the focus should be shifted towards women’s rights (1993, 20-21). Plumwood argues that this issue should not be viewed as commonsense but should “remain a central issue for feminism” (1993, 21). She calls for an ecological feminism in which “women consciously position themselves with nature” (21). This is when social oppression becomes related to the domination of the natural environment. Ecofeminist Karen Warren often speaks about the logic of domination when she is referring to this oppression because it is not only based upon gender and the natural world but also on “ethnicity, class, [...] and orientation” (Eaton 7).

Plumwood further argues that the contribution of the nature like women is not acknowledged by anthropocentric and materialistic society. Money minded society and people neglect the true value of women and the nature treating these autonomous entities as commodities to be possessed. She points out:

Primary among the others whose contribution is assumed but denied is nature, the sphere of the non-human, including animals, plants and

biospheric cycles and processes of which they are part. The relation of the colonising master subject to the sphere of the nature is one of center to periphery. The center sees the peripheral other or external sector as a place outside itself ('elsewhere') that can be used for dumping negative externalities (pollution, excess goods) and for collecting positive externalities. (2002, 28)

Christopher McCandless abandons and dumps his old car in the nature, which is negative externality for him as he does not advocate materialism, and then he commences his adventurous journey to Alaska to discover his true self, which is a positive externality. A man aware of the agency and autonomy of the nature would not have done such irrational thing. In the name of exploring his inner self proving his agency to his parents and the society, he consciously or unconsciously attempts to erase or downgrade the agency of the nature.

According to Plumwood, "When we treat other's agency as background or deny it, we give less credit to the others. We easily come to take for granted what they provide for us, and to starve them of the resources they need to survive" (Krakauer 1996, 30). Plumwood sounds pretty harsh and vehemently criticizes the act of objectifying nature in the following lines:

Instrumentalism involves the assumption that all other species are available for unrestricted human use, although it is unlikely that many of those steeped in the ideology of human supremacy will see humans as mutually and reciprocally available for non-human use (for example, as food).

Instrumentalism in this form is a clear expression of anthropocentrism and of

an arrogant attitude to the other which sees it in the guise of a servant to the self (2002, 113).

Thus, it is pretty obvious from the above lines that it is our irrational mind and our anthropomorphic desires that allow us to see the natural phenomena as something that are put there so that we can unrestrictedly use them. Plumwood further adds:

Instrumentalism is a mode of use which does not respect the other's independence or fullness of being, or acknowledge their agency. Its aim is to subsume the other maximally within the sphere of the user's own agency. It recognises no residue or autonomy in the instrumentalised other, and strives to deny or negate that other as a limit on the self and as a centre of resistance. (1993,142)

Moreover, feminine language and metaphors have also instrumentalized nature. They allow people to feminise nature and see it as an object to exploit. By doing so, people put themselves above the nature, thereby justifying the unwise destruction and exploitation of nature. Tzaporah Berman claims that the use of certain metaphors and expressions such as 'rape of the land', 'virgin forest', and 'Mother Earth', which do little in creating the fissure between humans and humans, and between humans and nature, are part of the cause of the mutual subordination of women and nature (265). This type of scarring language may be, as Berman suggests, "the very language that is, ironically, used by many environmentalists who are fighting for socioecological change" (266). She explores the harm inherent in the use of the 'rape' metaphor that accompanies environmental discourse by pointing out that if it is true that humans tend to actualize the symbols they create and use, then we see that the 'rape' and 'virgin' metaphors set up the exploitation of Nature as akin to the rape of a woman.

As Berman notes “If metaphors are not just arbitrary language use but a reflection of our physical, cultural and social realities which in turn structure our activities, the use of the rape metaphor has grave implications” (265).

Even in using such seemingly wholesome anthropomorphic readings of the planet as ‘Mother Earth’, according to Berman, has the same effect in that “it allows us to transfer the cultural baggage from the metaphor itself onto the thing for which the metaphor is used” (263). This is particularly harmful when applied to the use of the ‘Mother nature’ metaphor in the context of a patriarchal culture, as the mother is the one who “satisfies all our needs, takes away waste, cleans and feeds us without any cost to us. While it is true that we have a certain dependence on our mother, we also have many expectations – it is unlikely that your mother will hurt you” (Berman 263).

Likewise, Louise Westling opines that “as we continue to feminize nature and imagine ourselves apart from the biota, we will continue to enable the ‘heroic’ destruction of the planet, even as we lament the process and try to erase or deny our complicity in it” (qtd. in Berman 265). It is applicable to biological diversity that sustains life is celebrated, women’s biological specificity is not recognised, and where women are seen as objects of nature.

Applying these ecofeminists’ views and arguments on the unreasonable exploitation of nature, I will closely analyse, in chapter II, the objectification of nature in Krakauer’s *Into The Wild*.

Chapter II: Objectification of nature by Christopher McCandless

Into the Wild portrays Christopher McCandless as a naive and lovable person, but he is pretty arrogant. He presents himself as a nature lover, a person who is inspired by Henry David Thoreau and Jack London. However, his actions do not justify his so called admiration and respect to the wilderness. There are a great deal of evidences and incidents of McCandless treating nature as granted and undermining its power and autonomy.

McCandless' negative and dismissive attitude to nature seems to have originated from Henry David Thoreau and his nature writings in which he portrays nature as something made solely for the humans to use. Thoreau believes nature is savage and awful and the earth made out of chaos. Let's consider his lines:

Nature was here something savage and awful, though beautiful. I looked with awe at the ground I trod on, to see what the Powers had made there, the form and fashion and material of their work. This was that earth of which we have heard, made out of Chaos and Old night. Here was no man's garden, but the unhandselled globe. It was not lawn, nor pasture, nor mead, nor woodland, nor lea, nor arable, nor waste land. It was the fresh and natural surface of the planet Earth, as it was made forever and ever,-to be the dwelling of man, we say,-so Nature made it, and man may use it if he can. (Krakauer 171)

When McCandless sets off for Alaska, he not only burns his money, but cuts up any cards on which his identity is imprinted. Thus, he somewhat literally loses his identity. It is also to Alaska that McCandless turns to escape humanity and he

perceives Alaska as a canvas onto which he can paint and repair his identity, thereby taking nature as a means to his own ends.

McCandless is not an adventurer who wishes to discover new landscapes for national glory. Rather, as he sees Alaska in private and intimate terms, McCandless is an adventurer of the self who wishes to discover new facets of his own being.

Krakauer describes the type of perception of Alaska to which McCandless subscribes:

“Alaska has long been a magnet for dreamers and misfits, people who think the unsullied enormity of the Last Frontier will patch all the holes in their lives”

(Krakauer4). Thus, despite the fact that McCandless refers to his journey into Alaska as his ultimate adventure, McCandless uses the identity of Alaska, and nature more generally, in order to construct and repair his own identity.

Keeping with Berman’s arguments on the use of certain metaphors that encourage people to see nature as a feminine entity, we can find the use of such metaphor being used in *Into the Wild*. In his personal narrative, Krakauer describes his feeling when he sees the pictures of the Devils Thumb which he wished to climb. The following lines explain:

I owned a book in which there was a photograph of the Devils Thumb, a black-and-white image taken by an eminent glaciologist named Maynard Miller. In Miller’s aerial photo the mountain looked particularly sinister: a huge fin of exfoliated stone, dark and smeared with ice. The picture held an almost pornographic fascination for me. (Krakauer 135)

He uses the metaphor “pornographic fascination” while describing his feeling upon seeing the beauty of the mountain. Rather than seeing the mountain as a

mountain, he takes it as if it is a sensual woman meant to be possessed, conquered and raped. Thus, this is a particular area where ecofeminism comes into play to shed light on people's attitude, especially male, to nature.

Moreover, the process of commodifying nature can be seen in McCandless' attempt to use language as a tool for identifying and describing nature correctly. McCandless seems to assume that if he is to survive, then he must translate nature's purity into language. When McCandless loses his health and grows sick and thinner day by day, he consults some of his books on flora and fauna so as to identify the edible and inedible plants around him. In those books, he finds information on "wild potato roots" and "wild sweet pea". He reads the description of the inedible plant, and he learns that the wild sweet pea possesses lateral veins and is poisonous. However, McCandless mistakes the inedible wild sweet pea as edible wild potato. This mistake eventually leads to his death. Here, the point is that language cannot represent nature with accuracy.

Thus, it can be said that McCandless wishes to gain a sense of control over the wild or to tame the wild. This incident also depicts his desire to convert nature into something quantifiable and something that can be categorised. This linguistic control that McCandless attempts to exert over nature is a desperate attempt at survivalism by treating nature and its phenomenon as objects.

McCandless takes nature as a refuge, a place of healing. As such, individuals idealize natural places as a means of offering solutions to their own existential problems. It seems that he seems to be able to find solace and peace innature. However, his over obsession with nature kills him. Chris McCandless' trip to Alaska "was to be an odyssey in the fullest sense of the word, an epic

journey that would change everything" (Krakauer 22). However, the idea that nature can somehow solve one's problems is a faulty one. Nature is no more a refuge for one's spiritual problems nor it is a dumping ground for one's unwanted material garbage.

Chris McCandless' intentional rejection of a map (in order to create wilderness in his mind) is result of underestimation of nature. Chris McCandless did not die in the Alaskan wilderness because he intentionally disposed of a topographical map; he died because he carried too much of the past with him, too much literary history, and too much nostalgia for wild frontier landscapes that can no longer be found in most of the contemporary U.S. Perhaps this also explains Chris's decision to go forward into Alaska without a map. While McCandless was undoubtedly influenced by Jack London and Henry David Thoreau, Clary claims that McCandless "misread" the principles of their texts and overlooked the "literary nature" of the narratives (Krakauer 179). What mattered to McCandless was the "idea" of wilderness, the "idea" of living off the land (Krakauer 176), rather than the material reality of Alaska's drastically changing sub-arctic conditions.

Into the Wild does reinforce that nature is a refuge from one's problems, it does note that what Chris learns, in part, is that society is necessary, that "happiness is only real when shared" (Krakauer 189). It seems that, from his lonely vantage point in the wilderness, he looks to society now as a means of reconnecting. However, this understanding is a subtle one and may be overlooked by those looking to follow in McCandless' footsteps. After believing nature to be a refuge, nature then becomes man's objective. If this thing can heal us or make us happy, we have to have it. A problem with this, besides the fact that it permits man to attain the object at whatever cost, is that it breeds competition and risk-taking among the seekers, leading many to

believe that they are separate from one another, as well as separate from the object. McCandless is not connected to nature, rather than nature usually a wild or desolate landscape such as the Alaskan tundra is the object of man's desire. With regard to separateness, he does connect with nature physically by traversing its various landscapes, but a fundamental understanding that man and nature cannot be separated is missing, that 'we' and 'it' might simply be thought of as 'us'. Without this idea, it is easy to believe that nature is below man and can therefore be conquered, manipulated, controlled.

Despite McCandless' apparent love for natural places, he contributed to the objectification of those places. Krakauer narrates:

At that point he gave up on preserving the bulk of the meat and abandoned the carcass to the wolves. Although he castigated himself severely for the waste of a life he'd taken, a day later Mccandless appeared to regain some perspective, for his journal notes, henceforth will learn to accept errors, however great they be. . . I went far enough to please my imagination. (166)

McCandless seems to be sympathetic to wild animals however his sympathy is mere apparent. He kills a moose to quench his hunger. He kills the moose and eats. He does not bother to manage remaining meat, which could be contemptuous to other creatures nearby. He abandons the carcass randomly. He ultimately justifies his act of killing the moose as a source of pleasing his imagination.

McCandless keeps record of the dates whenever he kills wild creatures for his food. These non-human creatures include "gourmet duck", "squirrel", "porcupine, ptarmigan, grey bird", "canada goose", "moose" and many more (Krakauer 165).

After hunting these wild animals he takes his own pictures with his rifle feeling extremely ecstatic and proud as if he has won a battle. The following lines explain:

On June 5, he shot a Canada goose as big as a Christmas turkey. Then, on June 9, he Bagged the biggest prize of all: **“MOOSE!”**he recorded in the journal. Overjoyed, the proud hunter took a photograph of himself kneeling over his trophy, rifle thrust triumphantly over head, his features distorted in a rictus of ecstasy and amazement, like some unemployed janitor who'd gone to Reno and won a million-dollar jackpot. (Krakauer165)

He shoots and mercilessly kills those animals but fails to preserve the meat. He follows the advice of hunters he'd consulted in South Dakota, who advised him to smoke his meat. He writes in the journal of June 10 that “butchering is extremely difficult” (Krakauer165). He does not bother to throw the unuseful parts in the river as he writes “Get hindquarters and leg to stream” (Krakauer165), “Remove heart and other lung. Two front legs and head. Get rest to stream”, thereby polluting the river. (Krakauer166)

Almost everyone who encountered Chris McCandless knew that Alaska had become his objective: "Charlie: But like I was saying, Alaska, - yeah, he talked about going to Alaska..." (Krakauer43). In the same line another character Jan Burres states: "I thought Alex had lost his mind when he told us about his 'great Alaskan odyssey,' as he called it. But he was really excited about it. Couldn't stop talking about the trip." (Krakauer46). Another character Ronald Franz makes remark: "He confided that he was biding his time until spring, when he intended to go to Alaska and embark on an 'ultimate adventure'"(Krakauer51). More than an objective, Alaska had become

his obsession. Objectives can make one blind to reality, to the obvious: one cannot "conquer" something that one is intrinsically a part of, nor is Alaska a safe place to test this theory. As one of the last true wilderness places, Alaska is unforgiving and those not prepared for its hardships are bound to find real danger. McCandless demonstrates his idea that Alaska was conquerable, which indicates his understanding of it as an object, by arriving there ill-prepared (he carried more books than he did food). McCandless underestimates the power of nature.

Upon first arriving to Alaska, McCandless is overwhelmed by the wild beauty of his surroundings, but instead of being charmed on first impression, he is taken aback and somewhat irritated by the extremity of the colors and the utter strangeness of the place. It is depicted in a letter he writes to his friend asserting:

I have been thinking more and more that I shall always be a lone wanderer of the wilderness. God, how the trail lures me. You cannot comprehend its resistless fascination for me. After all the lone trails is the best. . . I will never stop wandering. And when the time comes to die, I will find the wildest, loneliest, most desolate spot there is.

(Krakauer 91)

As he is overwhelmed with his surroundings, he is equally excited with it. As nature is stranger to him, so is his travel, suggesting that McCandless lumps them both in to the same category, one entity inseparable from each other. Ironically, he follows this statement with a passage about the treatment of the nature by males and the description is similar to how the land is regarded. In both cases, the value is measured in proportion to if and how much they can be used.

Here, the connection between McCandless and the natural world is as clear as the water. His observation of a natural detail helps shape his opinion to nature and

environment, thus objectifying nature. He formulates an image of her which is the one he desires and expects from a wife, that of a chaste, innocent, and poised girl, closer to the ordered beauty of agriculture from his binary opposition, rather than the Alaska. It is the recognition and the naturalizing of difference that leads McCandless to “Other” nature, and he may symbolize the entire white empire which sees in terms of male/female, white/black, artificial/natural, rich/poor, civil/savage. The second term in each of these binary opposites represents those which must be controlled in order for the first term to stay in control, so it is easy to see how the theory behind ecofeminism, the association between the domination of women and the domination of nature, works: each is seen as a threat to the hierarchy of the patriarchy and must be restrained and manipulated to the male benefit.

In addition, McCandless takes nature in utilitarian propose. It is here that exploitation and marginalization transform into oppression. “Once it has been determined that one does not care for another’s well being and she no longer has a use, oppression comes into play, completing all three stages of his conception of domination” (Cudworth 56). It is obvious that McCandless still desires to have control over nature. His vindictiveness is clear with his plans to be lost in to the nature, which is interesting because he does not acknowledge that the nature has power.

He makes some fatal mistakes that lead to his untimely death. There are many things that he doesn’t know about the weather, or how to preserve and gather food in the wilderness. He ultimately dies of starvation after a failed attempt to leave his camp in Alaska. Krakauer tells the story of McCandless with clarity and detail that must have come from extensive research. Through interviews with the people that surrounded McCandless, the portrait of a young

man is shaped. He seems idealistic, conflicted about his place in this world, and in possession of very strong morals. But he also seems somewhat delusional.

McCandless famously went into the Alaskan wilderness without a map, which was one of the factors that contributed to his death.

Conclusion: Nature is not Meant to be Possessed

This research started from an ecofeminist perspective and moved from the analysis of the representation of the natural world in literature towards exploring the relationship between men and nature in an analysis of the travelogue *Into The Wild* by Jon Krakauer. The aim of this research was to unearth the protagonist's hidden motives and his negative attitude to nature because of which he treats nature as an object, thereby commodifying nature.

Ecofeminism as a theory has proven to be very useful in identifying the relationship between men and nature in *Into The Wild*. Even though this text does not highlight women's oppression by men, it certainly depicts the mistreatment of nature by Christopher McCandless. I have used the 'oppressor' and 'victim' *binary* to explore the objectification of nature in the very text. The relationship between men and nature; and nature and culture was viewed and described as one of the domination. The nature has been found to be the victim due to the anthropomorphic mindset of men.

Christopher McCandless, in spite of being born in an affluent upper-middle class family, decides to live a transcendental life preferring nature to culture. One major reason of this intent is his spoiled relationship with his parents. He is heavily influenced by the prominent writers and philosophers like Henry David Thoreau and Jack London and their nature writings. In the name of discovering his self and creating a new identity, he sets off for Alaska unprepared and with lack of knowledge

on survivalism in the wilderness. He tries to objectify nature for his own pleasure. Although the text does not narrate any extreme violence committed to nature, it is McCandless' arrogance and masculine attitude to nature that causes troubled relationship between him and nature. In order to quench his hunger, he kills different non-human creatures which he calls 'game' as if those creatures exist there for his pleasure. He takes nature as a place which is meant for adventurous activities and as a means to prove his masculinity and protect his own agency by disregarding the autonomy of nature. He underestimates the power of nature which eventually turns out to be his inevitable downfall.

To reiterate, this paper aims to identify Jon Krakauer's *Into the Wild* as an early project in ecofeminist thought by tracing the ways in which the male protagonist, McCandless, closely exploits natural environment, often viewing the nature as an object. Not only he underestimates power of nature, but he views it as matter of utility.

McCandless, represents the ideal of the Nineteenth Century white Empire and nature presents the "Other" that needs to be tamed, just like the landscape. Though it is common for human to be associated with nature, the domination and exploitation of nature is the problem that ecofeminists wish to eradicate. Reading *Into the Wild* through an ecofeminist lens proves to be an effective exercise in making connections between the naturalization of placing women and nature in the same category and the consequences of doing so.

Throughout *Into the Wild*, the reader knows that McCandless has died as a result of ignorance, chance, and unfortunate decisions, but this early description of the task ahead of him nonetheless raises the narrative stakes. It also classes

McCandless and many of the other characters the reader encounters as 'misfits and dreamers' and prepares the reader for a special examination of those character types. A careful reader might discern an address to herself in the mention of dreamers and misfits. Alaska residents, for instance, insist that people like Christopher McCandless are fools to approach the wild with the idea that its vast beauty will solve their emotional or spiritual difficulties. No plan laid by any of the book's explorers seems to succeed. Nature confounds nearly all of them. In his personal narrative, Krakauer stresses that he was unspeakably lucky to have survived his attempt to summit the Devils Thumb glacier, because of storm conditions he could not have foreseen. McCandless studies his edible plant guide and makes no mistakes in identifying species he can use to supplement his diet. He succumbs; however, to a mold growing on a seed he thought was safe to eat. A flooded river blocks his way when he decides he wants to head back to civilization. Many of the book's events, including its final outcome, reflect the tragic irony of the idea that nature can be controlled. Too much of nature is both invisible and too unpredictable for McCandless to survive.

Overall, this research has shown that humans, especially males, have dismissive attitude to nature. They put themselves above nature so that they can justify the unwise exploitation of the wilderness. As is shown by the ecofeminists, there is connection between the domination of women and nature. Males have always treated the nature the way women have been mistreated by patriarchal and capitalist society. Applying this insight of ecofeminism to *Into The Wild*, we have explored that McCandless is no different than the other males of a materialistic society that seeks immense pleasure and adventure in nature. He sees nature with the same eyes with which a male dominated society sees the women and nature.

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