Freedom on the Free Place, Alaska, as Seen in Into The Wild by Jon Krakauer

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Abstract

Into the Wild is a novel written by Jon Krakauer. The novel tells the story about a man, John McCandless, who wants to be free from all the things that he does not like. The story begins when he escapes from his daily life and lived in the free place, Alaska. He wants to live in Alaska in order to get his real freedom where he can do many things that he likes. This study analyzed the reason why the main character, John, wants to escape. To analyze the novel, intrinsic and extrinsic approaches were used. Objective theory was used because the writer analyzed the aspect of literary work itself. To support the analysis, a psychology approach was used by using the behaviorist theory. The findings indicated that there were several reasons that stimulated Chris to escape and disappear from his daily life. They were anger, love, and infatuated.

Keywords: Freedom, Free Place.

I. Introduction

Literature is a work that is presented in words reflecting daily life. It comes from someone’s experiences and thoughts. It can reflect history, culture, and society. Guerin (1992) implied that human creates art to tell mostly about human life. It gives knowledge for readers and encourages someone’s life. By seeing, reading, or listening to literature, one can be both acknowledged and informed.

Robert (1999) stated that literary works are divided into four categories; they are prose, poetry, drama, and nonfiction prose. In this case, the writer will analyze a novel as a part of prose fiction. Novel can show one’s life by knowing the complication plot. The show of one’s life can be reflected on the conflict faced by characters in the novel. To reach author’s feeling, the reader needs to read the novel. It gives us the description of the relationship between freedom and social environment.

The writer analyzed the novel by Jon Krakauer entitled Into the Wild. Jon Krakauer who was born on April 12, 1954. He is an American writer and mountaineer, well-known for outdoor and mountain-climbing writing. His novel mostly tells about adventures. It is influenced by his background who loves the adventure. Some of them are Eiger Dreams: Ventures Among Men and Mountains (1990), Into Thin Air (1997), Under the Banner of

Into The Wild is one of Jon Krakauer’s novels which tells the true story of Christopher Johnson McCandless, a young man from East Coast family. The story tells the struggle of Christopher Johnson McCandless who lives in the free place. He does it in order to be far away from his father’s command and to get his real freedom.

Into the Wild was published in 1996 and shortly thereafter spent two years on the New York Times bestseller list. This novel was adapted into a film which was released on September 21, 2007.

The writer is interested in analyzing the major character (Christopher Johnson McCandless). The story begins when he escaped from his daily life and lived in the free place, Alaska. He wanted to live in Alaska in order to get his real freedom which he can do many things that he likes.

II. Methods of the Research

The first step in doing the research was searching and collecting the data. Library research was used to collect the data. In this research, the novel of Into the Wild was used as the primary sources of the research. Some references and books were used to support the analysis. The second step was selecting and analyzing the data. The writer used qualitative method to analyze the data in the forms of phrases, sentences, and paragraphs. The last step was reporting data. In reporting the data, the writer used descriptive method.

In analyzing this novel, the writer used objective theory. Objective theory was used because the writer analyzed the aspect of literary work itself. The structuralism theory was applied to support the objective theory. It was applied because literary works can be related to another science. To support the structuralism theory, the structural dynamic was also used in this research because the research focused on the major character. The writer concerned with the intrinsic aspect of the novel. The research focused on the main character, Chris McCandless. The writer chose the psychology to analyze the major character in the novel. From the aspect of psychology, the writer used behavioristic theory.

III. Analysis

This part explains about Christopher Johnson McCandless’s character, internal family relationship of Christopher Johnson McCandless’s family, research method, and finding.

3.1 Christopher Johnson McCandless’s Character

This part explains the character of the main character, Christopher Johnson McCandless, whose nick name was Chris. Chris came from a well–to–do family. Their parents who came from blue-collar family have college degree. He is a smart man. It can be known through the sentences ”……Chris was a high achiever in almost everything that caught his fancy. Academically he brought home A’s with little effort. (p 109) He could get the good mark easily.

Chris was smart not only in academic but also in daily life which can be proven through the sentences”...Franz grew increasingly fond of McCandless. “God, he was a smart kid,” the old man rasps in a barely audible voice.”(p 52) Franz was an old man that Chris met in the Salton City. He taught Chris the secrets how to make the craft. He was astonished to the tooled leather belt make by Chris. He created an artful pictorial record of his wanderings.

He was a kind of person who liked to spend his time alone. We can see through the sentence:
“I don’t think he ever hung out with any of the employees after work or anything. When he talked, he was always going on about trees and nature and weird stuff like that. We all thought he was missing a few screws.” (p 40)

He preferred reading many books rather than talking and hanging out with his friends. He thought and lived in his dream living on Alaska that made others thought that he is mad. It can be shown in the sentence “….He just didn’t make the connection. It was like he was off in his own universe (p 40).” He spent much time alone and it seems hard for him to be around people. People thought that he was a strange man who always thought about Alaska and his dreams.

Chris found difficulties being around people because he spent much time alone. He preferred keeping all of his problems in silence rather than talking to other people. When he was around people, he would be a nice, polite, and friendly man.

He gave much of his attention to the homeless people. It can be seen through the sentences:

“On one occasion Chris picked up a homeless man from the streets of D.C., brought him home to leafy, affluent Annandale, and secretly set the gut up in the Airstream trailer his parents parked beside the garage. Walt and Billie never knew they were hosting a vagrant.”(p 113)

He took home a homeless people without his parent’s knowing. He didn’t understand how people go hungry.

Chris is a hard worker. He has done all of his jobs well. We can see through the statement of Westerberg, a man who was met in Carthage.

“I’ve given jobs to lots of hitchhikers over the years,’ says Westerberg. Most of them weren’t much good, didn’t really want to work. It was different story with Alex. He was the hardest worker. I’ve seen. Didn’t matter what it was, he’d do it: hard physical labour; mucking rotten grain and dead rats out of the bottom of the hole – jobs where you’d get so damn dirty you couldn’t even tell what you liked at the end of the day. And he never quit in the middle of something. If he started a job, he’d finish it. It was almost like a moral thing for him. He was what you’d call extremely ethical. He set pretty high standards for himself.” (p 17-18)

Westerberg was a man that Chris met in Carthage. He helped Chris a lot and gave him a job. He liked Chris’s work and compared him with other hitchhikers who seemed not to be serious in doing their job. Chris worked hard without paying to the time until he finished all of his works. He had a high level of himself in doing jobs. He did not care about the condition of his job. He would finish it even though it was a dirty job.

When Chris was a little, he accustomed to work hardly. He grew a vegetable at the back of his house. He sold the vegetables grown behind his house to his neighbours. He did not let his vegetables back home to get much money.

Chris grew up and he was still a hard worker. He never stayed and gave up trying something new. It can be seen from the sentences:

“When Chris was twelve, he printed up a stack of flyers and started a neighbourhood copy business, Chris’s Fast Copies, offering free pickup and delivery. Using the copier in Walt and Billie’s office, he paid his parents a few cents a copy, charged customers two cents less than the corner store charged, and made a tidy profit.”(p 116)

It is clear that he was a hard worker. He borrowed his parent copier machine and started a copy business. In order to get the higher profit, he hardly worked to pick up and deliver the
customer’s orders. He divided the profit with his parents because he had used his parent’s property.

In conclusion, Chris was a kind of person who prefers to spend his time alone by reading many books and deeply thought what was on his mind. He was a hard worker because he could do many things alone without someone’s help.

3.2 Internal Family Relationship of Christopher Johnson McCandless’s Family

Oxford Learner’s Pocket Dictionary stated that internal means connected with inside of something and family means a group consisting of one or two parents and their children. Furthermore, it is stated that relationship means the way in which a person is related to somebody else in a family. It can be concluded that internal family relationship means that the way in which a person is related to somebody else in an inside of group consisting parents and children.

McCandless’s family was consisted of Walt (father), Billie (mother), Chris (son), and Carine (daughter). Walt worked for NASA which gave him a high income. He got all of he wanted and the success even though he came from a poor family. It can be seen from the sentences:

“Walt grew up poor in Greeley, Colorado, an agricultural town on the high, windswept plains up near the Wyoming line. His family, he declares matter-of-factly, “was from the wrong side of the tracks.” A bright child, and driven, he won an academic scholarship to Colorado State University in nearby Fort Collins. To make ends meet, he held down an assortment of part-time jobs through college, including one in a mortuary, but his steadiest paycheck came from playing with Charlie Novak, the leader of a popular jazz quartet. Novak’s band, with Walt sitting in on piano, worked the regional lounge circuit, covering dance numbers and old standards in smoky honky-tonks up and down the Front Range. An inspired musician with considerable natural talent, Walt still plays professionally time to time.”(p 105)

Walt was a smart man because he could get the scholarship to Colorado State University. He had a strong expectation to change his life from the poor one became the better one. He took a part time job to support his life in Colorado. He could do many part time jobs including in a mortuary that was a building where dead bodies are kept before a funeral. He got the higher wage by playing piano with Novak’s band in the regional lounge circuit.

Walt worked with NASA for four years. He decided to be entrepreneur. It can be seen from the sentences:

“When Chris was six, Walt was offered a position at NASA, prompting a move to the nation’s capital. They bought a split-level house on Willet Drive in suburban Annandale. It had green shutters, a bay window, a nice yard. Four years after arriving in Virginia, Walt quit working for NASA to start a consulting firm – User Systems, Incorporated – which he and Billie ran out of their home.”(p 107)

After getting the success and collecting much money, Walt and Billie built their own firm, User Systems, Incorporated. They cooperated together to build their new firm. The firm ran out successfully and they got much money.

Unfortunately, their success did not make their children happy. They spent much time with their work and less spent time with their children. It can be seen from the sentences:

“Mom and Dad put in incredibly long hours. When Chris and I woke up in the morning to go to school, they’ be in the office working. When we came home
in the afternoon, they’ be in the office working. They ran a real good business together and eventually started making bunches of money, but they worked all time.” (p 107)

Carine protested to her parent business which was spending their time. Whenever Carine and Chris went to school and back home, their parent was still in their work. They had to spend all of their time in order to run the successful business. The main consequence was they lacked their time with their children.

Chris gave present to his father as a birthday present. It showed that Chris was care to his family. It can be seen from the sentences:

“I remember sitting there when he gave Dad the telescope,” says Carine. “Carine had tossed back a few drinks that night and was pretty blitzed. He got real emotional. He was almost crying, fighting back the tears, telling Dad that even though they’d had their differences over the years, he was grateful for all the things Dad had done for me. Chris said how much he respected Dad for starting from nothing, working his way through college, busting his ass to support eight kids. It was a moving speech. Everybody there was all choked up. And then left on his trip.” (p 118)

Carine talked that Chris gave a telescope to his father as a present in his birthday. Walt, Chris father, was really sentimentally touched by the present. Chris said a short speech that he appreciated his father’s work in order to keep his eight children. He started his work from nothing and became successful because of his hard work.

Chris gave present to his mother too. He gave it as Mother’s Day present. It can be seen from the sentences:

“The next day was Mother’s Day. Chris gave Billie candy, flowers, and a sentimental card. She was surprised and extremely touched. It was the first present she had received from her son in more than two years, since he had announced to his parents that, on principle, he would no longer give or accept gifts.” (p 20)

Chris tried to please his mother by giving her a present in the Mother’s Day. He gave candies, flowers, and a card that made her emotionally affected. It also showed that he loved his family.

Chris was closed to his sister, Carine to whom he would like to share about his feeling. They spent more time together rather than with their parent. It can be seen from the sentences:

“I was always getting on Mom and Dad’s case because they worked all the time and were never around,” she reflects with a self-mocking laugh,” and now look at me: I’m doing the same thing.’” Chris, she confesses, used to poke fun at her capitalist zeal by calling her the duchess of York, Ivana Trump McCandless, and “a rising successor to Leona Helmsley.” His criticism of his sister never beyond good-natured ribbing, however; his quarrel with Walt and Billie, Chris once wrote to her, “Anyway, I like to talk to you about this because you are the only person in the world who could possibly understand what I’m saying.” (p 129)

It is clear from the sentences that Carine has closed relationship with his brother. They spent more time together rather than with their parent. They had the same feeling about their parent who had the limited time with them and unlimited time to work.
Chris seldom made a call to his family. In his opinion, he did not want to disturb his parent’s work. He could solve his problem alone. It can be seen from the sentences:
“Chris seldom contacted his parents, and because he had no phone, they couldn’t easily contact him. Walt and Billie grew increasingly worried about their son’s emotional distance. In a letter to Chris, Billie implored, “You have completely dropped away from all who love and care about you.”(p 124)

Chris did not have phone, so his parent was difficult to contact him. Because of that, his parent was being anxious. His mother, Billie said in a letter to him that he became far away from those who loved him.

Chris admired his grandfather because his grandfather had raised the wildlife around Iron Mountain. It can be seen from the sentences:
“He also worked as a hunting guide, which pained him even more. “Men from the city would drive up in their big Cadillacs, and my dad would take them out to his hunting camp for a week to get a trophy. He would guarantee them a buck before they left, but most of them were such lousy shots and drank so much that they couldn’t hit anything, so he’d usually have to shoot the deer for them. God, he hated that.” Loren, not surprisingly, was charmed by Chris. And Chris adored his grandfather. The old man’s backwoods savvy, his affinity for the wilderness, left a deep impression on the boy.”(p 108)

Chris liked his grandfather because his grandfather was brave to survive on the wilderness. He could hunt and shoot the deer. He would find some animals in a trap, and take it home. Actually, he hated to shoot the animal, but he had to shoot it because he was a hunting guide who guided people for hunting and had to shoot when people could not shoot an animal.

The nuclear family of Christopher Johnson McCandless’s family consisted of Walt, Billie, Chris, and Carine. This family rarely met together because of their own business. Walt and Billie spent their time much to work and rarely met with their children. Because of their business, Chris and Carine spent much time together and became closer.

The business of Walt and Chris disturbed their relationship with their children. They did not realize that their children needed their attention and love. They only thought that the best way how to take care of their children was to complete their material needs especially money. On the other hand, their children thought that what they really needed was their parents’ attention. The business and the thing that had been done of their parents affect the personality of their children. It can be seen from Chris’ behaviour which spent much time alone and wanted to be far away from his daily life.

IV. Findings
After doing the analysis, the writer found several reasons why the main character, Chris McCandless, wanted to escape.

4.1 The Internal Stimuli that Guide the Response of Christopher Johnson McCandless in Getting Freedom
The internal stimuli that can be found in the novel are anger and love. These internal stimuli can be analyzed in order to find relation to the response of Chris McCandless in getting freedom.

1. Anger
Sobur (2003) stated anger can be understood as feeling of depression. People tend to be angry and become aggressive if they have to confront to the disturbing situation. Anger that
can be found in Chris personality could be classified as one of the internal stimuli that guide the response of Chris in getting freedom. In other words, anger as one of the internal stimuli can be classified as feeling depression. It comes when people have to face the difficult condition where nobody could understand themselves.

Chris was angry to his father. There were many events that stimulated his anger. It can be seen from the sentences:

“Like many people, Chris apparently judged artists and close friends by their work, not their life, yet he was temperamentally incapable of extending such lenity to his father. Whenever Walt McCandless, in his stern fashion, would dispense a fatherly admonishment to Chris, Carine, or their half siblings, Chris would fixate on his father’s own less than sterling behavior many years earlier and silently denounce him as a sanctimonious hypocrite. Christ kept careful score. And over time he worked himself into choler of self-righteous indignation that was impossible to keep bottled up.”(p 122)

Chris saw people by their own work not by their status in life. This quotation implies that even though his father tried to do many things to be a good father for their children, Chris was still on his mind describing his father as hypocrite.

Chris’ anger to his parents begun when Chris knew his father continued his relationship with Marcia, his first wife. It can be shown by the statement:

“Chris’s smoldering anger, it turns out, was fueled by a discovery he’d made two summers earlier, during his cross-country wanderings. When he arrived in California, he’d visited the El Segundo neighborhood where he’d spent the first six years of his life. He called on a number of old family friends who still lived there, and from their answers to his queries, Chris pieced together the facts of his father’s previous marriage and subsequent divorce – facts to which he hadn’t been privy.”(p 121)

Chris found the fact that his father continued his relationship with Marcia from their neighbor in El Segundo. The fact that he found made him very angry to his parents. His parents tried to hide all the facts from their children that made him become more hurt. It can be proved from the sentences:

“Eventually, Walt, Billie, Chris, and Carine moved to the East Coast. The divorce from Marcia was at long last finalized, allowing Walt and Billie to legalize their marriage. They all put the turmoil behind them as best they could and carried on with their lives. Two decades went by Wisdom accrued. The guilt and hurt and jealous fury receded into the distant past; it appeared that the storm had been weathered. And then in 1986, Chris drove out to El Segundo, made the rounds of the old neighborhood, and learned about the episode in all its painful detail.”(p 121)

It is clear that their parents wanted to hide the truth from their children by moving to the East Coast. After his father ended his marriage to his first wife, Marcia, he legalized his marriage with Billie. Both, Walt and Billie kept the secret in silence almost twenty years. Chris found the fact that his father kept two relationships between two women in his life from his old neighborhood in El Segundo. It made him very hurt by knowing it.

Chris’ anger was stimulated by his parent’s arrangements. He did not want his life organized. He thought that he was the only person who determined his own life. The arrangement of his parents can be seen from the pressure about attending college. It can be found from the sentences:
“Early in his senior year at Woodson, Chris informed is parents that he had no attention of going to college. When Walt and Billie suggested that he needed a college degree to attain a fulfilling career, Chris answered that careers were demeaning “twentieth-century inventions,” more of a liability than an asset, and that he would do fine without one, thank you.” (p 114)

Chris did not want to be forced by continuing his study in a college. In his view, one must have responsibilities in doing many things and then he will get the success. It is different from his parents’ side; one must have college degree in order to get the successful career. It can be seen from their parents command to him, “Go to college, get a law degree, and then you’ll be able to have a real impact.” They forced Chris to attend college.

Forcing to enroll the college is not the only one of Chris’ anger to his parent. Another of his anger are paying for the college and purchasing him a car. His parent wanted to buy him a new car as a graduation present.

2. Love

Sobur (2003) stated that love is any of a number of emotions related to a sense of strong affection and attachment. The word love can refer to a variety of different feelings, states, and attitudes. This diversity of uses and meanings, combined with the complexity of the feelings involved, makes love unusually difficult to consistently define, even compared to other emotional states. Love can be classified as the second internal stimulus that guides the response of Chris McCandless in getting freedom. In other words, love is strong emotion that influenced Chris in getting freedom.

There are many kinds of love. One of them is love to the nature as one of the internal stimuli that guide the response of Chris McCandless in getting freedom. His love to the nature was growth since he was a kid. It can be seen from the sentences:

“When Chris was eight, Walt took him on his first overnight backpacking trip, a three-day hike in the Shenandoah to climb Old Rag. They made the summit, and Chris carried his own pack the whole way. Hiking up the mountain became a father-son tradition; they climbed Old Rag almost every year thereafter.” (p 109)

Since Chris was a little, he had been taught by his father how to climb. One day, his father brought him to Shenandoah in order to climb Old Rag. By climbing the mountain, he was closer to the nature and enhanced his love to the nature. Chris’s love to the nature can be seen from his journey. He made many journeys to satisfy his desire in loving the nature. He captured many photographs of the beautiful views, animals, plants, etc. It can be ensured from the sentences:

“The duck hunters dropped him in El Golfo de Santa Clara, a fishing village on the Gulf of California. From there McCandless took to the sea, traveling south down the eastern edge of the gulf. Having reached his destination, McCandless slowed his pace and mood became more contemplative. He took photographs of a tarantula, plaintive sunsets, windswept dunes, the long curve of empty coastline. The journal entries become short and perfunctory. He wrote fewer than a hundred words over the month that followed.” (p 35)

Chris made a journey in El Golfo de Santa Clara, a small town on the Gulf of California. He crossed the sea and travelled south down the eastern of the gulf. By making many journeys, Chris became closer to the nature. He captured the images of tarantula, plaintive sunsets,
windswept dunes, and the long curve of empty coastline. He extremely admired the beauty of the nature.

In conclusion, Chris had the strong affection to the nature, so he could disappear from his daily life. He could enjoy and respect the beauty of the nature. He also wanted to face the challenge that comes from the nature.

4.2 The External Stimulus that Guide the Response of John McCandless in Getting Freedom

Dollard and Miller stated that the external stimulus or cue (psychology term) is a stimulus that serves as a discriminative signal, rather than as a motivator. It can be external such as an object or person and it can be internal such as thought. These stimulus is obtained from the environment that guide one’s responses.

The external stimulus that can be obtained from the novel is Jack London. He was a writer that wrote Call of the Wild. Call of the Wild was the book which is read and reread many times by Chris. It can be observed from the sentences:

“He helped me a lot,” Burres acknowledges. “He watched the table when I needed to leave, categorized all the books, made a lot of sales. He seems to get a real kick out of it. Alex was big on the classics: Dickens, H.G. Wells, Mark Twain, and Jack London. London was his favorite. He’d try to convince snowbird who walked by that they should read Call of the Wild.” (p 43)

Chris was really obsessed with Jack London. Jack London, whose life symbolized the power of will, was the most successful writer in America in the early 20th Century. His vigorous stories of men and animals against the environment, and survival against hardships were drawn mainly from his own experience at sea, or in Alaska, or in the fields and factories of California. London’s story of Call of the Wild made Chris enchanted and discovered the difficulties to distinguish the fact and the fiction of life in the subarctic wilderness.

Chris admired Jack London. It can be observed from the sentences:

“He helped me a lot,” Burres acknowledges. “He watched the table when I needed to leave, categorized all the books, made a lot of sales. He seems to get a real kick out of it. Alex was big on the classics: Dickens, H.G. Wells, Mark Twain, and Jack London. London was his favorite. He’d try to convince snowbird who walked by that they should read Call of the Wild.” (p 43)

Chris had many favorite writers, such as Dickens, H.G. Wells, Mark Twain, and Jack London. London was his most favorite and he persuaded other people to read the novels by Jack London.

In addition, Chris imitated what London had been done, such as having dog, opposing the justice, and living off in Alaska. Chris loved his dog much. It can be seen from the sentences:
“Chris was crazy about Buck,” Carine says. “That summer he disappeared he’d wanted to take Buck with him. After he graduated from Emory, he asked Mom and Dad if he could come get Buck, but they said no, because Buckley had just been hit by a car and was still recovering. Now, of course, they second-guess the decision, even though Buck was really badly hurt; the vet said he’d never walk again after that accident. My parents can’t help wondering – and I admit that I can’t, either – how things might have turned out different if Chris had taken Buck with him. Chris didn’t think twice about the risking his own life, but he never would have put Buckley in any kind of danger. There’s no way he would have taken the same kind of chances if Buck had been with him.” (p 128)

Chris was really excited about Buck, a puppy that was bought by his parent when he was twelve. Chris and Buck had done daily trailing runs. They became closer because they spent much time together. After Chris graduated, he wanted to take Buck with him. Unfortunately, Buck got an accident and he could not walk again. Therefore, his parent did not permit Chris to take the dog, but Chris was still in his mind keeping the dog. He did not realize the consequences by taking the dog.

The main evidence that shows Chris imitated what London had been done was his journey to Alaska. It was shown by the sentences:

“The sun came up. As they rolled down from the forested ridges above the Tanana River; Alex gazed across the expanse of windswept muskeg stretching to the south. Gallien wondered whether he’d picked up one of those crackpots from the lower forty-eight who come north to live out ill-considered Jack London fantasies. 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. The bush is an unforgiving place, however, that cares nothing for hope or longing.”

(p 4)

Chris had changed his name into Alex in order to complete severance from his previous life. Gallien, a man who was met by Alex in his way to Alaska Range gave him a ride. Gallien questioned whether he was a kind of person who came Alaska to live out impulsive Jack London fantasies. Gallien said that Alaska was a place that attracted people to come and it was not a place that gave them what they wanted.

In short, Jack London had imagined Chris a lot. Chris imitated what London had done. One of them that can be seen clearly was living in Alaska. Alaska in Chris’s mind was a place that could give him a freedom that he wanted. Finally, he went there and came closer to the nature.

V. Conclusion

After analyzing the novel, there were several reasons that stimulated Chris to escape and disappear from his daily life. They consisted of two stimuli. The first stimuli, called internal stimuli, are anger and love. The second, called as external stimuli, is that Chris was infatuated much by Jack London who wrote the novel Call of the Wild. This novel was read and reread by Chris. By reading this novel, Chris could imagine and wanted to live off in Alaska. He was also attracted by Jack London’s life which went off from one place to another place.
References


