

Speaker

Jon Krakauer, speaker of *Into the Wild*, is a driven, ambitious man with an almost insatiable curiosity. As a young man, Krakauer was pushed to be the best person he could be by his hard working, high expectations father. Though he did not become a doctor like his father wished, he did inherit his father's ambition and drive. The most obvious example of Krakauer's ambition was his ascent of the Devils Thumb. Krakauer's main passion in life was mountain climbing. It is not surprising, then, that in his early twenties, he became enamored with the thought of scaling the dangerous, untouched northern face of the Devils Thumb in Alaska. Not one to be discouraged by the threat of death, Krakauer quit his job, headed north, and set out to conquer the mountain. The journey was fraught with peril, pushing him closer to his demise than he had ever been before. Eventually, despite two failed attempts and dwindling supplies, Krakauer's ambition drove him to the peak. This ambition does not stop at mountain climbing, though; Krakauer also has an unquenchable thirst for knowledge. According to the author's note, he was "haunted" by Chris McCandless' death and wanted to know more. Krakauer's desire for information about McCandless' demise sent him all across America. He retraced all of Chris' steps, interviewing everyone he met. His ambition and thirst for answers even sent him into the very Alaskan wilderness that killed McCandless. Krakauer stopped at nothing to achieve what he wanted.

Occasion

Jon Krakauer wrote *Into the Wild* after writing an article about Christopher McCandless's death which appeared in the January 1993 issue of Outside magazine. After writing the article, he wanted to know if the original facts and conclusions he came to about McCandless were correct. Christopher McCandless fascinated Jon Krakauer and he wanted to know more about the man and if the details in the article that garnered so much attention were a hundred percent accurate. Krakauer would find out that a key detail he published in his article, that critics frequently used to support their negative conclusions about McCandless, was

wrong. In the original article it was believed McCandless had mistakenly thought the animal he shot was a moose when it was in fact a caribou. The two hunters that found him swore that the animal he shot was a caribou and that “you’d have to be pretty stupid to not tell them apart” leading many to believe McCandless was dumb and “incompetent”. Krakauer, in his quest to find if facts were right, would see the animal corpse was in fact a moose and not a caribou when he inspected the corpse at the site where McCandless died. Photographs taken by McCandless would also prove this true and show he was not as ignorant as many seemed to believe. Another fact Krakauer got wrong in his article about McCandless was exactly what led to McCandless’s death. In his article he “reported with great certainty” that McCandless had died because he confused a wild sweet pea plant with the wild potato plant, an easy mistake to make as the plants are very similar. Krakauer had become captivated by story and needed to find answers. The more and more he thought it over, he realized that this could not be a plausible answer for McCandless’s death. Krakauer continued reading books and conducting research to find the answer to his death. After coming up and discarding various theories, he finally concluded McCandless died by eating moldy seeds from the wild potato plant. These seeds were poisonous because of the mold that had developed when he kept them in a zip lock bag. Krakauer’s fascination with the article he wrote about McCandless and his journey to find out answers is what led him to write *Into the Wild*.

Audience

Jon Krakauer wrote *Into the Wild* for himself because he identifies with McCandless. Krakauer himself sees himself in McCandless’ actions and personality. Krakauer and McCandless are both “ambitious,” “intense,” and “heedless.” Both Krakauer and McCandless’ ambition drove them to dangerous hitchhiking adventures, regardless of the likelihood of death. They both endured overwhelming physical conditions in order to succeed. Krakauer overcame an ice storm on top of a mountain duly named Devil’s Thumb. McCandless survived the harsh conditions of nature and greeted death happily. Their similarities allow Krakauer to

identify with McCandless. Furthermore, Krakauer and McCandless have similar relationships with their fathers. Krakauer, after revealing “long-held family secrets,” isolated himself from his father and created a rift of bitter tension. He denied making peace until his father, gone insane and suffering from a form of polio, was admitted to a psychiatric ward. Eventually, he forgave his father and thanked him for the “bridge of privilege” he had made. Similarly, McCandless “brooded” over his father’s secret affair with his first wife for two years before “withdrawing” from his parents and aggressively criticizing their mistakes to his sister Carine. In response to one of his mother’s letters begging with him to rethink his lifestyle, McCandless exploded in outrage to his sister, calling his parents “imbeciles.” Eventually, McCandless apologized to his father, “fighting back tears” as he explained his gratitude for Walt’s hard work. The “unsettling parallels” between Krakauer and McCandless’ lives allow Krakauer to identify with McCandless. *Into the Wild* is part biography and part autobiography written by Krakauer with Krakauer in mind.

Tone

Krakauer writes the bulk of *Into the Wild* in an analytical, colorless tone, in order to “minimize [his] authorial presence.” However, there are instances in which Krakauer casts of his fear of bias and displays emotion, especially when writing parts of the book concerning him. He sadly recalls his experience on the Devil’s Thumb, a particularly perilous mountain: “I felt abandoned, vulnerable, lost. I realized I was sobbing.” By using the words ‘abandon,’ ‘vulnerable,’ ‘lost,’ and ‘sobbing,’ Krakauer creates a mournful tone. The word ‘abandon’ brings to mind isolation and loneliness; Krakauer felt like the people he loved had left him to die on the mountain. He felt open to attack and death, weak, and helpless, by describing himself as ‘vulnerable.’ The realization that he was alone made him not only cry, but “sob.” ‘Sobbing’ is a more intense form of crying akin to mourning. Krakauer is mourning the loss of his safety and the absence of his loved ones. By using powerful diction, Krakauer conveys to the reader the emotions felt by a lonesome hitchhiker.

Tone

Jon Krakauer's attitude toward Christopher McCandless in *Into the Wild* is one of understanding toward the actions and choices he makes throughout the course of the book. Krakauer has a sympathetic and understanding tone toward McCandless and attempts to understand and analyze the reasons he committed certain actions. While Krakauer admits McCandless made mistakes and was naïve about the amount of equipment he needed to make it out in Alaska, he never claims him to be dumb but instead says he was young. In one of the last chapters of the book, Krakauer discusses how when people are young, they behave very impulsively and that "danger held a certain allure" when in one's youth. He states, "McCandless, in his fashion, merely took risk-taking to its logical extreme." This line shows how Krakauer's tone is one of understanding of Christopher McCandless and the actions and choices he made. He uses the word fashion which shows he found McCandless to be doing what everyone else did at that age but in his own way. If he did not understand his reasoning, Krakauer could have easily used another word such as irresponsible or heedless. His use of the word risk-taking shows that he acknowledges McCandless took risks but most youths do. Krakauer notes in the lines before how young people drink a lot, speed when they drive, try drugs and in the olden days were eager to fight in wars. Krakauer also uses logical to describe how McCandless took risk taking to as far as it can appropriately go. Krakauer does not think McCandless is mindless for the actions he took but instead sees he was a young-adult and understood and was sympathetic to his passions and risk-taking. Krakauer is empathetic with McCandless's actions as he remembers when too was just like him and understands exactly where the boy is coming from.