

People's Democratic Republic of Algeria
Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research
Larbi Ben M'hidi University-Oum El Bouaghi



Faculty of Letters and Languages
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"condemned to freedom": Existentialism in Late Twentieth Century

American Literature through Jon Krakauer's *Into the Wild*

**A Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the
Degree of Master of Arts in Anglo-American Studies**

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2015-2016

Candidate Declaration Form

I, TRIKI Djamel Eddine Akram,
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in partial fulfillment of MA Degree in **Anglo-American Studies** is my own original work,
and it has not previously, in its entirety or in part, been submitted at any university.

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Dedication:

Every challenging work requires self-effort, commitment, and orientation of elders especially those who are close to our hearts. This very work study is gratefully dedicated to my loving Father and Mother who stood by my side every single day, and whose affection, endearment, spur, and supplication to

Allah make me able to finish this work.

Acknowledgement:

First and foremost, I hereby express my gratefulness to Allah for giving me knowledge as well as understanding. I thank Allah for giving me the strength to finish this humble study.

I would like to express my deepest appreciation to my diligent teacher and supervisor Miss S. Achiri, whose expert guidance, understanding, and advice contributed to a considerable simplification of writing this project. I am genuinely thankful for her full support throughout my study and research. I place on record, my sincere thanks to all my teachers in the Department of English Language, and especially those who introduced me to the bewitching world of literature.

Last but not least, I wish to convey my profound gratitude and appreciation to my dear parents whom I grew up motivated by their lives. I thank them from the bottom of my heart, and without their whole presence, I would not write in any other way. I can only say that success is in my stride because I have parents like them by my side.

Abstract

This dissertation joins a vibrant examination about the depiction of existential philosophy in late twentieth century American literature. It scouts about the portrayal of existential tenets through Jon Krakauer's *Into the Wild*. To explore this sketch, this dissertation uses existential theory in order to analyse this novel. The critical texts applied are Jean-Paul Sartre's *Being and Nothingness*, and Martin Buber's *I and Thou*. The ideas of alienation, freedom, authenticity, 'I-Thou' and 'I-It' are the major concepts applied on Krakauer's work. The first chapter is mainly theoretical which explicates the tenets and thoughts of acclaimed existentialists, their contribution to existential literature, and eventually to the whole philosophy as becoming a lionized literary movement. The second chapter argues that the Sartrean existential ideals of alienation, freedom, and authenticity are displayed through the protagonist of *Into the Wild* Christopher McCandless. When it comes to the third chapter, it argues that *Into the Wild* showcases the two Buberian different realms of relationships, 'I-Thou' and 'I-It', directly experienced by the same protagonist. By existentially dissecting Krakauer's work, it is demonstrated that the novel articulates the awareness of existentialism in its character as well as its plot. It is clarified that the novel embodies all the existential concepts mentioned above. As a conclusion, *Into the Wild*'s protagonist emphasizes the fact that existentialism is a way of life rather than just a philosophical movement. He proves that the societal values which the writer criticises does not define his true being. He bears the burden of freedom and uses it to mould an utter authentic existence. The novel also belays that despite any kind of status, and under any circumstances, life is relational rather than individualistic.

Keywords: Existentialism, Philosophy, Jean-Paul Sartre, Martin Buber, Freedom, Alienation, Authenticity, I-It, I-Thou, *Into the Wild*.

Résumé

La littérature est souvent reconnue pour acquérir une exposition de conceptions philosophiques de manière à donner une explication des objectifs et des messages des auteurs. Cette mémoire se joint à un examen dynamique de la représentation de la philosophie existentielle dans la littérature fin du vingtième siècle américain. Il explore au sujet de la représentation des principes existentiels via *Voyage au bout de la solitude* par Jon Krakauer. Pour explorer cette esquisse, cette mémoire utilise la théorie existentielle pour analyser ce roman. Les textes critiques appliqués sont *L'Être et le Néant* de Jean-Paul Sartre, et *Je et Tu* de Martin Buber. Les idées de l'aliénation, de la liberté, l'authenticité, 'Je-Tu', et 'Je-Cela' sont les principaux concepts appliqués à ce roman. Le premier chapitre est essentiellement théorique et explique les principes et les pensées des existentialistes acclamés, leur contribution à la littérature existentielle, et finalement à toute la philosophie que de devenir un mouvement littéraire glorifié. Le deuxième chapitre fait valoir que les idéaux existentiels Sartrienne de l'aliénation, la liberté et l'authenticité sont affichés dans le protagoniste de *Voyage au bout de la solitude*, Christopher McCandless. En ce qui concerne le troisième chapitre, il fait valoir que ce roman met en valeur les deux royaumes Bubérien différents des relations, 'Je-Tu' et 'Je-Cela' directement éprouvé par le même protagoniste. En disséquant existentiellement ce roman, il est démontré qu'il articule la prise de conscience de l'existentialisme dans son caractère et son intrigue. Pour conclure, le protagoniste insiste sur le fait que l'existentialisme est un mode de vie plutôt qu'un simple mouvement philosophique. Il prouve que les valeurs de la société que l'auteur reproche ne définissent pas son être véritable. Il porte le fardeau de la liberté et l'utilise pour façonner une existence authentique. Le roman assure que malgré toute sorte de statut, et en toutes circonstances, la vie est relationnelle plutôt qu'individualiste.

ملخص

غالبا ما عرف عن الأدب احتواؤه على عرض للمفاهيم الفلسفية كوسيلة لتقديم وتوضيح أهداف الكتاب و رسائلهم. هذه الأطروحة تنضم إلى فحص حيوي حول تصوير الفلسفة الوجودية في الأدب الأمريكي أواخر القرن العشرين. و إنها تستكشف تصوير المبادئ الوجودية من خلال كتاب ' نحو البرية' لجون كراكاور. لاستكشاف هذا المخطط، هذه الأطروحة تستخدم النظرية الوجودية في تحليل هذه الرواية. النصوص النقدية المستخدمة هي ' الوجود و العدم ' لجون ول سارتر و كذلك ' أنا و أنت ' لمارتن و. أفكار العزل ، الحرية ، الأصالة ، 'أنا-أنت' و 'أنا-الشيء' ، هي المفاهيم الأساسية التي طبقت على عمل كراكاور . الفصل الأول هو في عمومته نظري و الذي يفسر مبادئ و أفكار الوجوديين المعروفين ، مساهماتهم في الأدب الوجودي ، و في الأخير الفلسفة ككل عندما أصبحت حركة أديّة محتفياً بها. الفصل الثاني يناقش أن أفكار سارتر الوجودية حول العزلة ، الحرية ، والأصالة تظهر من خلال طلب الرواية ' نحو البرية ' كريستوفر ماكاندلاس. أما النسبة للفصل الثالث ، فهو يناقش أن ' نحو البرية ' يعرض حقلين مختلفين ليو في العلاقات ، 'أنا-أنت' و 'أنا-الشيء' ، مختبرة مباشرة من طرف نفس طلب الرواية . عن طريق تشريح عمل كراكاور وجوديا فإنه ظاهر أن الرواية توضح الوعي الوجودية من خلال شخصيتها وكذلك حبتها . انه من الواضح أن الرواية تجسد المفاهيم الوجودية الذكورة أعلاه . وختاما ، طلب رواية ' نحو البرية ' يؤكد على أن الوجودية هي أسلوب حياة و ليست فقط حركة فلسفية . وهو يثبت أن القيم المجتمعية التي ينتقدها الكاتب لا تحدد حقيقته الوجودية . انه يتحمل عبئ الحرية و يستخدمه لصقل و تشكيل وجودية أصيلة مطلقاً . الرواية أيضا تثبت انه بالرغم من أي وضع و تحت أي ظرف من الظروف فان الحياة علائقية أكثر منها فردية

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Introduction:

The existential philosophy as it was known in the days of Soren Kierkegaard as well as Friedrich Nietzsche was a philosophy that concerned itself with the true meaning of existence. It was not until the first half of the twentieth century that existential philosophy held the name existentialism. By dint of preeminent figures such as Jean-Paul Sartre, Simone de Beauvoir, and Albert Camus, existentialism put forth miscellaneous conceptions that brought novelty to the stream of twentieth century philosophy. It is the study of human existence and how one finds meaning in a meaningless world internally with no reference to external attributes and influences whether they are societal codes, cultural mores, religious norms, or even political institutions. The focal interest of existentialism is the status of individuality towards making an essence and meaning for one's own existence. Besides the atheistic existential version of such figures, another religious version was also dominant in the twentieth century which was led by Martin Buber and Gabriel Marcel. Rather than the individualistic concerns of atheistic existentialism, these religious existentialists were interested in the relational patterns. Individualistic or relational, the existentialists focused on the possibilities of man's true and genuine life and the path towards an ardent authentic existence.

Existentialism will be very significant when it comes to Jon Krakauer's *Into the Wild* because the elements of this philosophy are well expressed by the author who was also a mountain climber to find the truth about himself, and who therefore understood the motives of his protagonist Christopher McCandless. He used Existentialism as a way to give a clear image of the American society in the second half of the twentieth century. People like Chris

McCandless tended to be nonconformist, independent, and they let their experiences define them through the search for the true self and the meaning of existence. Moreover, existentialism will also be more important because the writer used it as a way to criticise the materialistic and conformist American society at the time, and with which people defined themselves against the principles of their society. Existentialism can better represent the life of postmodern American society emphasizing that what counts is personal experience. That is, an experience which is separate from and elevated above ordinary life. It will be the convenient choice for this research because the novel does not only exhibit the individualistic patterns of existentialism but also the relational ones as well, for it incorporates the protagonist's encounters and relationships with several other characters. This dissertation will address several questions like how is existentialism displayed and also manifests itself in the novel? It will also address the question of how and why can the protagonist of *Into the Wild* be considered as an existential hero? This research will scout whether *Into the Wild* can be regarded as a direct criticism of postmodern America?

In spite of the fact that existential aspects are clearly displayed in *Into the Wild*, existentialism does not come into view to take part in American literary productions. The previous studies did not count the novel to be considered as an existential literary work. *Into the Wild* is regarded as a transcendentalist work that brings in the theme of American men escaping from civilization. Consequently, this issue is not adequately discussed. The novel is interpreted as viewing the protagonist to be a man escaping from civilization for the sake of pondering nature, and that it shares the frontier theme with some of the great works that the protagonist takes with him through his journey such as David Henry Thoreau's *Walden*. In this light, the previous studies on the novel sought to view *Into the Wild*'s protagonist as a transcendentalist character.

This dissertation will attempt to explore the existential elements that are displayed in the American novel *Into the Wild* so as to understand the young Americans' way of thinking and their reactions towards the authority of parents, materialism, conformism, and also commercialism. Along this process, this research will try to find the aspects where the protagonist practices existentialism through his actions, deeds, decisions, and his attitudes towards people he encountered throughout his journey. The research will also scout about existential factors and how they are exhibited and represented by the author in order to define the protagonist as an existential hero, hence, the novel as an existential piece of literature.

Into the Wild is the story of Christopher Johnson McCandless who, after his graduation, donates all his college funds to charity and longs for a long adventure in search for his true identity. He decides to quit society and all patterns of civilization once and for all to find the truth about himself and the meaning of his existence beyond the stream of twentieth century American lifestyle. Existentialism will be totally relevant to this study because in the novel the protagonist bids existential aspects both individually and through his encounters as well as relationships with the other characters.

It is utterly endorsed that existentialism as a very broad philosophy can have a lot of varieties when it comes to existentialist ideas from one figure to another. However, it had witnessed some of the interrelated and commonly held perspectives of its main figures which in turn brought all existentialists under the same banner. These existentialists had introduced several interesting concepts that contributed to the clear comprehension of the basics of this philosophy. Over the years of the twentieth century, philosophy moved onward to be displayed in art, music, and literature. Therefore, existentialism will be used to analyse Jon Krakauer's *Into the Wild*. The concepts to be applied are Sartre's alienation, freedom, and authenticity, and also Buber's 'I-It' and 'I-Thou'. The very reason behind choosing these concepts is the fact that all of them go appropriately well with the text.

This dissertation will comprise three chapters. The first chapter will be mainly theoretical with the inclusion of the genesis of existentialism, the philosophy's conceptions, and its main figures as well as their contributions. The chapter will examine a detailed explication of existentialism as a philosophical conception as well as its salience as a literary movement. It will also draw upon the development of existentialism and its embracement into American literature.

The second chapter will put into practice the Sartrean version of existentialism through the novel. In so doing, this chapter will examine the concepts of alienation, freedom, and authenticity. It will scrutinize the exhibition of these concepts in accordance with the protagonist's status and deeds. In order to shed light on these existential ideals, the protagonist of *Into the wild* will be the focus of this analysis.

The third chapter will move to apply the Buberian version of existentialism. 'I-It' and 'I-Thou' are the existential concepts that indicate the two realms of relationship. The latter will be applied in accordance with the protagonist's encounters as well as relationships with his family, friends, and the other characters whom he meets through his journey.

This work study will explore existential tenets in order to label the protagonist Christopher McCandless as an existential hero. It scouts his status of being alienated from his society, free to determine his destiny, and eventually exists as an authentic human being. It also stresses his existence in the realm of 'I-It' when he is alone in Alaska, and also his existence in the realm of 'I-Thou' in regard of his true existence that comes from meeting and genuine relationships with others.

To all intents and purposes, this dissertation will help to develop a clear understanding of the novel not just as an adventurous story into the American wilderness, but also as an existential piece of literature that stresses humanity's desire to be free and act

towards authentic existence. The dissertation will also clarify that *Into the Wild* is a novel that not only narrates the experience of man individually, but also his experience with human beings through genuine relationships. It will respectfully prompt the readers to build reasonable views about existentialism as a philosophy as well as its portrayal in the works of literature. This dissertation will induce the readers to mould plausible judgements about the novel's protagonist as not being a transcendentalist character, but an utter existential hero.

Chapter One

Existence Precedes Essence: The Destiny of Self-Conscious Human Beings

It is established beyond doubt that literature performed its significant role in distinct cultures, providing a diverse series of interpretations accompanied by, to an elevated extent, numerous messages that always made a considerable amount of sense to the world. Literature has always had the tendency of depicting the status of its surroundings. As a matter of course, philosophy came into being way before the leaders and figures of literary productions introduced their pieces.

In fact, philosophy encompasses concepts that interpret the meaning of human existence and direct the individual through real and sensory experiences of daily life. Literature, on the other hand, does not come up with such concepts. What literature circumscribes is the incorporation of these concepts, in addition to themes, motifs and symbols. The latter may be religious, social or even political. That is to say, whilst philosophers bring about salient conceptions that convey their thoughts, literary figures often appear to implicate their messages through a clever consolidation of philosophical concepts with their literary works.

It is necessary to point out that literature as well as philosophy have some aspects to share. Like philosophy, literature aims at the human being. It tackles a variety of ideas that can communicate with different kinds of peoples. However, literature does not provide guidance as much as philosophy does; that is, philosophy is presented through processes of

reasoning in support of an idea or theory. Philosophy is concerned with systematic approaches based on truth, rationalization, and argumentation, while literature tends to exhibit ideas through plots, settings, and characters. That is to say, whilst philosophy is direct and based on justification, the concern of literature is these philosophical approaches combined with the focal aim that resides in fiction.

In his review of A. Phillips Griffiths' book *Philosophy and Literature*, Suresh Raval incorporates R.W. Beardsmore's view that literary works "may no doubt involve problems and puzzles, but philosophy starts from them rather than culminates in them"¹. However, it is highly endorsed that literature has a link with philosophy as Raval also puts emphasis on Stein Haugom Olsen's argument that "it [literature] shares with philosophy certain fundamental thematic concepts, and like philosophy it exercises the intellect without instructing in the sense in which philosophy provides instruction" (152). This statement emphasizes the idea that philosophy as well as literature are totally interrelated. It also clarifies the very fact that while philosophy bestow guidance through plausible arguments, in like manner literature helps providing this guidance but indirectly through the works fiction.

1. Existentialism as a Philosophical and Literary Movement:

Existentialism is the philosophy that introduced new-fangled, unprecedented conceptions and thoughts the west had ever beheld. It was a philosophical movement that emerged in nineteenth century Europe which addressed the condition of human beings and the status of their existence. As Richard Gravil states: "Existentialism is 'the philosophy of existence'" ². It is the philosophy that integrates a serious concern about man and the

meaning of his existence. Accordingly, Wesley Barnes defines it as "a theory or statement about the nature of man's existence"³.

Existentialism in its nature was totally antithetical and contradictory to the earliest traditions of philosophy in which reason was the core central concentricity. Walter Kaufman defines it as being "not a philosophy but a label for several widely different revolts against traditional philosophy"⁴. Kaufman continues to mention a rather deep description of existentialism for a better understanding of the stream of this movement, and to be more comprehensible. As it is seen in his clarification:

The refusal to belong to any school of thought, the repudiation of the adequacy of any body of beliefs whatever, and especially of systems, and a marked dissatisfaction with traditional philosophy as superficial, academic, and remote from life—that is the heart of existentialism. Existentialism is a timeless sensibility that can be discerned here and there in the past; but it is only in recent times that it has hardened into a sustained protest and preoccupation. (12)

The first four lines of the quotation above, on the one hand, do indeed make it clear that existential thinking brought unconventionality and novelty into the ideology of philosophy. Existentialists indicated the unwillingness to accept any philosophical, religious, or scientific system. In his book, *Existentialism*, Thomas Flynn wrote: "[t]he existentialists are not irrationalists in the sense that they deny the validity of logical argument and scientific reasoning. They simply question the ability of such reasoning to access the deep personal convictions that guide our lives"⁵. Any system would not be perceived as eligible to direct and indicate how one should behave or live. On the other hand, the last two lines of the quotation suggest the progression as well as the evolution of existential philosophy quite in

neoteric and contemporaneous times when compared with its status in the past. This idea of its evolution refers to the existential version of Jean-Paul Sartre.

Existentialism was first introduced in the works of the Danish philosopher Soren Kierkegaard (1813-55), although he was not the one who gave it the name existentialism. Kierkegaard was a Christian existentialist. He was respectfully considered the founding father of the movement along with his existentialist fellow Friedrich Nietzsche (5). But in light of the fact that Nietzsche (1844-1900) was "an impassioned anti-Christian" who hated the beliefs and practices of Christian faith, by some means, his existential thinking had an inclination towards controversial paths (Kaufman 11). Christianity was one of the systems and institutions that was rejected on the grounds that it deviates people from their internal, chosen feelings. It also influences their actions and deeds. Many were deprived of taking on elevated ranks, inventiveness, sexual relations, and intellectual proficiency. Robert C. Solomon argues that "[Nietzsche] attacks Christianity as a whole as a 'slave' morality, a 'herd instinct' detrimental to the progress of the species as a whole"⁶. Therefore, Nietzsche detested Christianity simply because it prohibited people from becoming what they want and what they really are. Perhaps that was the very reason he was labelled the anti-Christ.

Dissimilarly, Soren Kierkegaard was a Christian existentialist who had faith in the existence of God. However, he held that the belief in God does not come from religious institutions, tenets, or pamphlets. As Kaufmann points out: "[Kierkegaard] died, having worn himself out with protests against the perversion of Christianity by Christian institutions and refusing the ministrations of his church" (83). It is clear then that Kierkegaard was not really fond of the terms of his church.

What Kierkegaard really emphasized is that man should look for the true Christianity through sensory experiences rather than in churches. He arguably disregarded written

doctrines which were orated by priests who would instruct the way of life and belief. Nonconformity is a quality all existentialists believe a man should possess. The individual must realise his or her impotence in a careless world, and then act towards self-determination through rebellion: "rebellion against the apathy slumber of the intellectuals; rebellion against the insensitivity of colleagues; and rebellion against the inhumanity and irrelevance of institutions such as the Church, the state, and the university"⁷.

Under the conformity of the world, one can be liberated and act against such conformity. One has to search for the true self regardless of all these surroundings. One has to make a choice, a decision to overcome the imposed structures of the circumference. Therefore, in regards to their distinct existential ways of thinking, both Kierkegaard and Nietzsche focused on the freedom of human beings and their will to power, the search for existence through experience, and also overcoming the conformist self without the influence of external attributes.

Another prominent existentialist who contributed to the movement was the German philosopher Martin Heidegger (1889-1976). From the beginning of the twentieth century until the 1940's, Heidegger was exceedingly active in the fields of philosophy as well as phenomenology. His masterpiece *Being and Time* proved to be one of the most distinguished philosophical works of the period. His work is, to some degree, obscure and contentious due to its recondite as well as arcane philosophical words. The book is mainly concerned with the status of being, what is the real meaning of being, in addition to the case of *Dasein*⁸ which means being there, or being in the world. Heidegger incorporates a clear distinction between *Dasein* of human beings, and *Dasein* of physical objects and animals. The fact that human beings are there in the world, everyone should choose to define their true selves when confronting with the nothingness of life. Once they realise the evanescent nature of life, and

their beings are only temporary, they must act to overcome the already existing meaninglessness:

The facing of finitude gives birth to anxiety; it shows the presence of anxiety or nothing in human life; in anxiety, the nothingness of human existence shows itself. Anxiety is an expression of the finitude of human existence; as such, it belongs to all aware life according to existentialists. In anxiety, the finitude of human existence shows itself, truly to exist is to ex-ist. Existence for existentialists is to step out of the nothingness of existence, as it shows itself in anxiety, and it is to give life content, meaning, and direction through choice, decision, and deed (the Latin ex-ist means "to step out").⁹

This apprehensiveness is therefore the result of the realization of the finitude of life. But prior to the act of stepping out of this nothingness, the human is under the circumstance of being a stranger in the world. This condition leads to what existentialists identify as alienation. Thence, the realised nothingness must be overcome through resolution, commitment, the freedom to choose, and action. Alienation is one of the major concepts tackled by almost all existentialists.

Being in the world can determine one as being what one is not. In *Being and Time*, Heidegger deliberately shed light on the impact of publicness on individuality. He utilized the inclusion of two kinds of being in the world as a means to explicate the procedure towards an authentic existence. No doubt the individual is initially inauthentic when surrounded by all attributes of daily life. Nevertheless, one can evade or escape this inauthenticity by doing what one chooses to do, and not what social, religious, or political institutions impose. As Charles B. Guignon states:

As agents in familiar contexts, we generally do things as 'one' is supposed to do such things according to the way these activities are interpreted in our social context. We are attuned through our upbringing to move along the guidelines of the norms and conventions that govern the forms of life of our culture. As a result, we exist as instances or exemplifications of what Heidegger calls the 'they' or the 'anyone' (*das Man*).¹⁰ (Author's emphasis)

It is thus to say that conformity is always inevitable at first. Authenticity might not be realised when a person does not feel alienated from the world. And this affiliation makes a person fall under the circumstance of being one of the 'they'. In fact, the individual may realise his or her inauthentic being, but one happens to prefer to be in the circle of the public. In this case, one is choosing not to choose, rejecting one's own freedom, and eventually lying to one's self by accepting the fact of living an inauthentic life. The latter idea was thoroughly developed in the existentialism of Jean-Paul Sartre in the mid twentieth century. Inauthenticity can be escaped on the grounds that the individual must feel and come to be aware of his or her alienation. For one cannot engage into the path of finding the true self unless the self is firstly inauthentic, and then alienated. That is to say, the inauthentic status of following the crowd is inevitable, but when one feels alienated from the crowd, one is rejecting to live under its shells. When one is alienated, one has to create one's own destiny and live towards the path of authenticity. The focus of Existentialists is on the individual, and how one can escape all forms of inauthentic being.

In the aftermath of the Second World War, Europe witnessed a rather divergent wave of existential thought. On a serious note, this period spotted several utter existentialist figures. Apart from German existentialist philosophy, this time the French took the banner and came up with new concepts that really changed the world. Nonetheless, one cannot consider French existentialism as totally distinct from that of Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, and

Heidegger due to the linkage in the depth of their writings. That is to say, all existentialists have some aspects to share. Some of the French existential concepts were only an elaboration of the already explicated ones. Some were only perceived differently from those of their precursors.

French existentialism was at its peak in the 1940's by dint of acclaimed thinkers and philosophers. The most prominent, worth mentioning figure would be Jean-Paul Sartre (1905-80). The term existentialism was not acknowledged until Sartre gave this philosophical movement a name. Sartre was the only existentialist who accepted being one. Another eminent philosopher of this period was Albert Camus (1913-60). He was publicly opened about his not being an existentialist, or even affiliated with the movement. When it comes to feminist existentialism one must mention Simone de Beauvoir (1908-86), Sartre's life companion. She was so active being an existentialist, and made a noticeable contribution to modern existentialism. What also makes de Beauvoir worth mentioning is the very fact that she was the only woman affiliated with the movement. She made her views about the individual's existence known in her famous work *The Ethics of Ambiguity* which tackles the ambiguity of existence and also the concept of freedom.

There were several other figures who were believed to be associated with existentialism, or thinkers who were mainly influenced by the philosophy's conceptions. These encompass twentieth century philosophers such as the German Karl Jaspers (1883-1969), the French Gabriel Marcel (1889-1973), and also the Austrian Martin Buber (1878-1965). Richard Gravil mentions that "[t]hese three contribute much of the light and warmth to the Existentialist tradition, concerning themselves with man's possibilities of relationship to the divine and to other men" (12-13). Martin Buber was one of the major figures affiliated with religious existentialism. His contribution was to introduce what he called the two word pairs of interaction, or the two realms of relationship: 'I-It' and 'I-Thou'. Buber was an

existentialist whose concern was to alter the way people address and relate to each other through truthful and authentic relationships. Even though some of these leading thinkers refused to be regarded as existentialists, all the suggested above are more than enough to be serviceable in determining the theoretical framework of this research.

Jean-Paul Sartre was associated with what was called atheistic existentialism along with Albert Camus and Simone de Beauvoir. In regards to their inclination towards atheism, no inclusion of religion was required to diffuse their philosophical ideas. These French philosophers possessed the quality of persuasion not through religion, but by means of philosophical words. Each had his and her own views of the meaning of existence. But, eventually, there was a particular feature about existentialism which was the fact that all of them had some aspects to share. All of them share the interest in the condition of the individual's existence, one's alienation in a meaningless world, the freedom to choose one's own life as well as to utilize one's own freedom, the freedom to make one's own essence, and also the freedom to create one's own authentic being.

Sartre's *Being and Nothingness* was the most profound philosophical work Europe had ever seen. With its eight hundred and so pages the book arose many questions and held a series of complex arguments. *Being and Nothingness* explores an analysis of the real meaning of individual's existence. It is the analysis and the explication of how one should live in the world. The contribution of Sartre as an utter existentialist philosopher was the inclusion of some of the most interesting concepts of twentieth century philosophy which made him the most prominent figure of existentialism. Beginning with his renowned concept that existence precedes essence, freedom and responsibility, bad faith which is the equivalent of Heidegger's inauthenticity, and also the diverse kinds of being.

After the Second World War, the individual was mainly partial to existential thought. In regards to the very fact that existentialism was sort of a solicitous philosophy about the condition and meaning of human existence, people were totally attracted and captivated by it, and then eventually act according to its terms. That is to say, existentialism was more than a philosophy, it was a way of life.

One of Sartre's core concepts of existential thought is that of existence precedes essence. "[o]ur essence is the steady involvement of our existence and, as such, follows, but does not precede existence"¹¹. Sartre views human beings as totally distinct creatures when compared to objects. As Richard Gravil states: "[e]xistentialists agree that only people can *exist*. (Tables and dogs just are.) ... Human being is inescapably a constant self-transcendence" (Author's emphasis 8). In accordance with an existential, atheistic point of view, human beings are thrown into the world without any essence. Man has to search for the meaning of his existence, and make his own essence through what he does. Man is self-transcendent and can determine himself by his deeds. That is to say, man has an essence only if he creates it, and works towards determining it.

As opposed to human beings, objects cannot exist. Their essence comes before their existence. For example, the essence of a manufactured hammer is already known by its maker. In order for an artisan to make a hammer, he must have an already acknowledged idea concerning the essence of that hammer. In his mind, the artisan has a perception before even making the hammer. He cannot make the hammer before he knows what the hammer will be utilized for. This perception is the essence of that hammer which is a tool with a heavy metal head used for breaking things or driving in spikes. The same case for the essence of spikes. A spike's essence comes prior to its existence. A spike is made to be driven into wood with a hammer to join things together or to serve as a peg or hook. In this principle, the essence of an object comes before its existence. Its essence is already an idea in the mind

of its maker. The performance of its function is held prior to its coming. Therefore, when it comes to objects, Sartre's concept would be essence precedes existence.

Like objects, animals simply are. They eat, sleep, follow up their animal instinct, breed, and then ultimately die. But unlike human beings, animals do not have the freedom to choose to live one way or another; therefore, they cannot hold responsibility for the things they do. According to existentialists, animals cannot search for the meaning of their existence in regard of the fact that they do not exist. Freedom is another significant philosophical concept tackled by Jean-Paul Sartre. In regards to his existentialism, man exists, and then has to be preoccupied by creating his own essence in the world. That is to say, man has the total freedom to do whatever he wants, and that "man is condemned to be free. Condemned, because he did not create himself, yet is nevertheless at liberty, and from the moment he is thrown into this world he is responsible for everything he does"¹². Man must choose to use his freedom, to act as he wants, not as others impose. He must realise his self-transcendence in order to generate the formation of his own essence.

Freedom is a truth that the self-conscious human beings cannot escape. It is incumbent upon them to be fully free. If, however, man chose to hide from his freedom, he would be considered and looked upon as an object. He would fall in the patterns of what Sartre calls bad faith. In his book *Being and Nothingness*, Sartre argues that "we shall willingly grant that bad faith is a lie to oneself, on condition that we distinguish the lie to oneself from lying in general"¹³. To him, it is also important to acknowledge that "the one to whom the lie is told and the one who lies are one and the same person, which means that I must know in my capacity as deceiver the truth which is hidden from me in my capacity as the one deceived" (89). The circumstance of a man who goes living inauthentically in the world doing what he does not want to do, and hiding this fact by convincing himself that what he is doing is what he is supposed to do, is in fact an exhibition of bad faith. He is lying

to himself and not to others. Only he knows the truth. Consequently, he is the deceiver, and at the same time the one who is deceived.

Existentialists distinguished themselves by all endeavours to dramatically revolutionize the way philosophy was perceived. They tried to express the principles of existentialism through powerful, philosophical words. The philosophical conceptions of all existentialists altered the nature of philosophy. Respectfully, existentialism controlled the dawn of the twentieth century. Besides its prominence as a philosophy, existentialism was more than that. The existential thought attracted novelists, poets, playwrights, painters, and even sculptors. It paved the way for a considerable representation of philosophical ideas in art. It strengthened the fact that there is a reciprocal relationship between philosophy and literature. This was the intrinsic power of existentialism.

Existentialism was really influential in the times of Soren Kierkegaard. Actually, it was mainly known as a philosophy, and not much when it comes to its portrayal in the arts. It was not until the twentieth century that existential philosophy had its own remarkable merit. It was deliberately mirrored through the arts, and specifically through works of literature. Existentialism was at its peak as it was characterized by its nexus with prose and drama. Nonetheless, the world of literature in the nineteenth century acknowledged some of the most well appreciated writers as Fyodor Dostoyevsky. He was known as the first author who contributed to existentialist literature. He was the man who introduced existentialism to Russia through his literary works.

Some existentialists like Sartre as well as Camus were not only philosophers, but also, respectfully, candid authors who were credited for conveying this philosophy to the awareness of a much larger audience. It can be endorsed that most existential philosophical works would be intricately convoluted, and exceedingly complicated for some to be

comprehensible. Accordingly, twentieth century existentialists communicated with the individual through literary works.

This wave of existential literary productions was led by existentialist philosophers themselves. In addition, its enlargement and spread to the people was under the leadership of other illustrious novelists and playwrights. Hence, existentialism overran Europe by virtue of distinguished philosophers along with eminent minds in literature. These notable figures helped to introduce the philosophy of existentialism in their writings through fiction as well as nonfiction, and contributed to the movement by incorporating a series of diverse existential themes in order to represent the feelings of their protagonists. The literary nature of existentialism was seen in the works of acclaimed authors, namely "Pascal, Nietzsche, Dostoyevsky, Unamuno, Melville, and even Hemingway, but its most formidable and characteristic expression is to be found in the novels of Sartre and Camus"¹⁴. Even though some of these figures participated in conveying existential themes way before Sartre, they were not existentialists. As Stephen Michelman professes:

The scope of 'existentialist fiction' is thus indefinitely large, however, it is possible to introduce a distinction between three senses in which a work of literature may be considered existentialist: works of literature written by existentialist philosophers; works of literature influential to the development of existentialist philosophy; and works of literature that express an idea or content associated with existentialism, such as absurdity or alienation, but that otherwise are unconnected to existentialist philosophy.¹⁵

Besides some authors who were believed to exhibit some existential themes in their writings, it was the existentialist philosophers who really enlightened the individual through their existential, literary style.

In the 1940's, literary existentialism was well renowned in France. One must resign to the fact that both Sartre and Camus really bestowed on this period by their marvellous literary works. Their incisive writings reflected the period's circumstances and human condition. As a literary movement, existentialism depicted the very turbulence of World War II era. As Hans van Stralen states: "I consider literary existentialism, in the first place, as a movement which can be understood by way of existential phenomenology. Furthermore, this is a type of literature which is closely connected with World War II"¹⁶. Existentialists had the predilection of portraying man's sufferings and angst in a meaningless world. They concentrated on the actions of man around such wretched conditions, and his freedom to choose to define his own identity and essence. Existentialists did not embrace only a modicum of existential philosophy, but they combined all of the philosophy's conceptions with their literary works. They represented their philosophy through literature. They were interested in the turmoil of the war and its effects on the individual. Stralen also argues that "[they] focused their attention particularly intensively on World War II. Not only the actual events of the years 1940-1945, but also the phenomenon of the war in the supra historical sense, viz. as 'chiffre' of the human condition, as a symbol of madness, disorientation and frustration, are made into a theme in their work" (21).

Man resigned himself to the fact that life was meaningless, and accepted his status under such circumstances. There was no hope, and no motive to act. Man accepted life as it is with no freedom to choose and no initiative to search for the meaning of his existence, or create his true self and true essence. Man did not utilize his freedom to be self-transcendent. In this situation, existentialists interfered and based their writings on some very salient themes, namely bad faith or inauthentic life, not using one's own freedom, hiding from the truth and neglecting one's individuality, angst, despair, the repudiation of holding responsibility, etc.

Before moving to twentieth century literary existentialists, one must make into consideration the contribution of Dostoyevsky. Besides his acclaimed novel *Crime and Punishment*, Dostoyevsky was also known for his *Notes from Underground*, a sophisticatedly philosophical as well as psychological novella where he pictured his characters under the shells of sufferings, alienation, and sinking into the realm of quandaries. Walter Kaufman's major work *Existentialism From Dostoevsky to Sartre* also encompasses some sections of Dostoyevsky's *Notes from Underground*. He states: "I can see no reason for calling Dostoevsky an existentialist, but I do think that Part One of *Notes from Underground* is the best overture for existentialism ever written" (14). It is then clarified by Kaufman that Dostoevsky was not an existentialist, but rather a herald of existential thought whose characters undergo suffering, anguish, and torment.

The twentieth century witnessed the rise of one of the forerunners of literary existentialism. Franz Kafka was a Czech writer who was best known for his acclaimed fiction. He displayed his fiction under the shell of existential philosophy. Kafka's best known works include *The Metamorphosis*, *The Trial*, and *The Castle*. His works were the embodiment of existential conceptions such as alienation, nothingness, and absurdity: "Kafka stands between Nietzsche and the existentialists: he pictures the world into which Heidegger's man, in *Sein und Zeit* [*Being and Time*], is 'thrown,' the godless world of Sartre, the 'absurd' world of Camus" (143).

Similarly, Sartre and Camus introduced existentialism through their discerning and very peculiar novels and plays. They expressed their existential ideas as genuinely as their description of man's condition would directly goes in reference to existential philosophy. By all the odds, their literary works mirrored the current atmosphere of existential meaninglessness. Sartre's works were praised all over Europe. Sartre's *Nausea* is basically a philosophical novel that was introduced to Europe in 1938. The term nausea refers to a

feeling of anxiety and physical adversity. The novel contains Sartre's concepts of existential angst that man feels when searching for the meaning of existence in an indifferent world.

Although Sartre's French fellow did not approve to be considered an existentialist, he was always regarded as being one, and also totally associated with the movement. Camus' writings did not embody different nuances when compared with other existentialists. Rather, they emphasized the nothingness, meaninglessness, and the absurdity of the world. As a philosopher, Camus was a major contributor to the philosophy of the absurd. In fact, absurdism was Camus' bigger interest. He consecrated himself to the depiction of the absurdist aspects of life into his fiction. However, what Camus also focused on was the freedom of human beings and their capacity to overcome this absurdity.

On Camus' account, life is absurd. Man has to accept the indifferent and absurd nature of the world. Man has to use his freedom so as to conquer this absurdity, and to eventually create meaning for himself. Man also has the freedom to suicide. In regards to absurdity of life, one might think: what is the point of living? Thenceforth, suicide is a choice when man finds it impossible to find the meaning of life. Such ideas were portrayed in Camus' novel *The Plague* which was written in 1947. Camus sets the plot in the city of Oran, Algeria. It is about a plague and the decimation of the human being. The novel puts emphasis on the very fact that life's absurdity is inescapable, and under such circumstances as the plague, man has to face his own destiny, and tries to make essence in such situation.

In the early twentieth century, existentialism was a phenomenon that invaded all corners of Europe. The European literature witnessed a considerable change. Writers tended to incorporate diverse existential themes in their works. Stralen lists several European authors who were associated with literary existentialism. As he mentions:

Numerous writers who are mentioned in the textbooks about existentialism as a literary movement may be connected with the criteria of literary existentialism. The most frequently discussed authors in this regard are A. Moravia, A. Malraux (especially his *La Condition humaine*) (*Man's Fate*) (1933), F. Kafka, R. M. Rilke, E. Sábato, A. Blaman, J.-P. Sartre, S. de Beauvoir, and A. Camus. (68)

Towards the 1950's-60's, existentialism began to make further influences. By dint of Sartre's and de Beauvoir's succour, existentialism spread all over the world. Its tenets had a considerable impact on mind paving the way for a distinct view of the world, life, and existence. Consequently, American literature witnessed a radical change. American authors eventually found a way to interpret and illustrate the condition of human being in that period: "since World War II American fiction has displayed a radically transformed sensibility. It no longer aims to picture the content of American life but tries instead to say what it feels like to live in America. Its heroes are alienated, confused, despairing, neurotic, suicidal, eaten by self-hatred, and filled with existential angst"¹⁷. It is then to say, existentialism was the prodigy of twentieth century philosophy. It became a worldwide both a philosophical and literary movement.

From the mid-twentieth century onwards, writers altered the stream of American literary landscape. They set up their existential themes into the world of literature even if they were not affiliated with the movement. In other words, a writer who displays existential themes in his work does not have to be an existentialist. Richard Wright was an African American novelist who often caused controversy because of his writings. He was known for his racial themes in works such as *Native Son*, his autobiography *Black Boy*, and his marvellous novel *The Outsider* which reflects the brutality of American discrimination against black people. In fact, Wright moved to France when he was thirty six years old.

There was his inception of being interested in existentialism. Nick Aaron Ford wrote that "Wright's association with Jean-Paul Sartre, his friendship with Simone de Beauvoir, his acquaintance with Albert Camus, and the existentialism of his first novel, *The Outsider* (1952), suggested French Existentialist influence"¹⁸.

With the advancement and developments in communication technology, transportation, and medical technology, the world of literature also held considerable alterations. In the last third of the twentieth century, the sweeping changes brought by digital computing and mass media had a major impact on American popular culture, and literature tended to capture these contemporary changes. That is to say, writers vivified their works vis-à-vis their social, cultural, or political status. In spite of America's norm of superiority, ascendancy, and preponderance, man was unsatisfied with his condition. There were no wars nor plagues; however, existential alienation, the repudiation of cultural and societal impositions, and the search for identity were all experienced in daily life, and thenceforth displayed in literature. The latter ideas are the main concern of this humble research.

Jon Krakauer is an American writer. He was born in Brookline, Massachusetts, on April 12, 1954. Krakauer was not familiar with writing early in his life, or even not really fond of it. At first, he was a "carpenter and fisherman"¹⁹ who set up different goals for himself. Krakauer was a passionate man who lived for the unforgettable experiences of life. Prior to his engagement into writing career, he was a mountains' climber. Krakauer seemed to prefer the condition of being mesmerized by the bewitching appeal of nature. He would always find peace in the spectacular views of mountains sceneries.

In the 1990's, Krakauer left his former job to become a full time writer. In 1996, he wrote his first novel *Into the wild*, where he references his solitary experience in the secluded wilderness of Alaska. In the same year, Krakauer was a member of an expedition to climb

Mount Everest. He witnessed the single worst tragedy ever that became known as the 1996 Mount Everest disaster. This journey was known as Hall's expedition. Rob Hall was a New Zealand mountaineer and the head guide of this expedition. Krakauer was a member of this team. Four people had died including the team leader Rob Hall.

As a survived member of the team, Krakauer found himself in the position of being compelled to write about his experience, and share the story of his survival on Mount Everest. In 1997, he wrote his second novel *Into Thin Air*. The novel is based on the 1996 disaster, and gives the full particulars of the author's presence at Everest. In the novel, Krakauer details the events as well as the difficulties they faced under the harsh conditions of the mountain. This work was the bestselling nonfiction book of 1997: "*Into Thin Air* was, without doubt, a literary tour de force. It was Krakauer at his finest, as he looked at what drives men to go to the edge of life itself and take incredible chances" (Foster 153).

Krakauer continued to show his writing capacities in order to convey his thoughts to the world. In 2003, *Under the Banner of Heaven* was his third nonfiction novel. Krakauer was always sceptical about the authenticity of religious worship. Foster also argues that "[i]n spite of, or perhaps because of, the author's open disdain for religion, he inexplicably chose for his latest work a look at what he considers the violent history of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints" (156). The book thus was sort of an investigation about the history of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints and the practices of Mormonism²⁰ in the west.

In 2009, Krakauer has chosen to give an account of the changing circumstances in the life of the American football player, Pat Tillman. *Where Men Win Glory: The Odyssey of Pat Tillman* is a biographical book that tells the story of Pat Tillman, an American citizen who loves and has faith in his country. Influenced by September 11 attacks, Tillman feels

that it is incumbent upon him to leave his professional career as a football player and directly join the US Army to serve in the war against Iraq and Afghanistan. After two years, Tillman's service came to an end by his demise in 2004, in Afghanistan.

In regards to all of his intriguing works, Krakauer assuredly presents the mood of diversity. Notwithstanding his exhibition of different events and protagonists in distinct situations, Krakauer is a writer who displays alienated characters who experience intolerable levels of hardship for the sake of desire triumph; characters who use their freedom to define themselves despite all hurdles:

Both he and his works are complex, introspective, and, without doubt, 'in your face' and controversial. Krakauer is fascinated by people who are on the edge physically and emotionally, those who push the limits to the extreme. His writing reflects this fascination as he tries to define for his reading audience what it is like to go to extremes. Krakauer has succeeded where many others have failed because he is, without argument, a gifted writer. His text flows seamlessly, creating a literary picture that touches a reader to the very core.

(149)

In regard to the late twentieth century American literature, one has to make into consideration the most fascinating and genuine novel ever written: Jon Krakauer's *Into the Wild*. As it was already mentioned above, *Into the Wild* was Krakauer's first literary work. Krakauer is totally smitten by the appeal of the Alaskan wilderness, and as a former climber, he understands his protagonist's desire to be completely alienated. The novel tells the story of Christopher Johnson McCandless, a young man who leaves all his past behind and goes on an adventure for the search of his true identity.

Into the Wild can be regarded as a picaresque story because of the very fact that Chris McCandless is the hero who gives away all his college funds to charity; nonetheless, he is also the person who cuts his relationship with his family and goes through many experiences that eventually ended his life. McCandless is a character whom Sartre would mostly admire. Krakauer, on the other hand, does not only write to picture the beauty of nature, nor to only describe the sufferings of his protagonist. Krakauer does always have a message to convey.

Existentialism was the philosophy of existence. Sartre and associates introduced what all individuals had been waiting for. Man started to raise question about his inauthentic being. Man started to reconsider his blind affiliation with publicness, and work for creating his own individual essence. The realization of the true meaning of freedom led to the breakthrough of the individual from unbearable nothingness of daily life. Whilst many men chose not to use their freedom and live under the shells of inauthenticity and self-deception, many others were courageous of carrying the burden of freedom and responsibility for their actions. Many were preoccupied with the search of the meaning of existence.

The philosophy of existence as it was shaped in the days of Kierkegaard, Nietzsche and Heidegger was always controversial. Nonetheless, it was not a mere phenomenon. Existential philosophy was at its peak with engrossing conceptions. The meaning of existence exceedingly absorbed people's attention. But in the time of Sartre, existentialism was the utter phenomenon of the twentieth century. With the ingenuity of some salient figures as Sartre, de Beauvoir, and Camus, existentialism not only engraved its name as a prominent philosophical movement, but also prevailed against all odds and stamped its doctrines into the lines of literature. It elucidated the relationship of philosophy with literature.

Existentialism as a literary movement was closer to the individual. When the world changed, literature went through with it as well. In regard to the late twentieth century existentialism, writers pictured man as alienated and anxious about his existence even in the peaceful days of his life. Man is always free to choose what he wants to be. According to Sartre, our existence precedes our essence. We are free to choose, we create our essence.

With regard to Sartrean version of existentialism, the protagonist of *Into the Wild* exhibits his existential attitude and stands against all patterns of self-deception. He performs the role of a nonconformist character in the face of what he thinks can limit his freedom of choice. He longs for the meaning of his existence as well as finding his true identity. He is heading towards the path of authentic being. The latter ideas will be thoroughly examined in the following chapter.

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¹ Suresh Raval, *The Modern Language Review* 82.1 (1987): 152.

² Richard Gravil, *Existentialism* (Tirril: Humanities-Ebooks, 2007): 7.

³ Wesley Barnes, *The Philosophy and Literature of Existentialism* (New York: Barron's Educational Series, 1968): 2.

⁴ Walter Kaufmann, ed. *Existentialism From Dostoevsky to Sartre* (New York: Penguin, 1975): 11.

⁵ Thomas Flynn, *Existentialism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006): 13.

⁶ Robert C. Solomon, "A More Severe Morality: Nietzsche's Affirmative Ethics," *The Existentialists: Critical Essays on Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Heidegger, and Sartre*, ed. Charles Guignon (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2004): 69.

⁷ Patricia F. Sanborn, *Existentialism* (Pegasus: Western Publishing Company, 1968): 18.

⁸ It is a German word which means "being there" or "presence" (German: *da* "there"; *sein* "being") often translated in English with the word "existence". It is a fundamental concept in the existential philosophy of Martin Heidegger, particularly in his magnum opus *Being and Time*.

⁹ Jari Ristiniemi, "Existentialism," ed. Anne L. C. Runehov and Lluís Oviedo (Dordrecht: Springer Netherlands, 2013): 819.

¹⁰ Charles Guignon, Introduction, *The Existentialists: Critical Essays on Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Heidegger, and Sartre*, by Guignon (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2004): 9.

¹¹ Samuel L. Hart, *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 9.4 (1949): 769.

¹² Jean-Paul Sartre, "Existentialism is a Humanism," trans. Walter Kaufman, *Existentialism From Dostoevsky to Sartre*, ed. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Penguin, 1975): 353.

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¹⁴ Charles I. Glicksberg, "Literary Existentialism," *Existentialist Literature and Aesthetics*, ed. William L. McBride (New York: Garland Publishing, 1997): 2.

¹⁵ Stephen Michelman, *The A to Z of Existentialism*, ed. Jon Woronoff (Lanham: Scarecrow Press, 2008): 143.

¹⁶ Hans van Stralen, *Choices and Conflict: Essays on Literature and Existentialism* (Brussels: P. I. E.-Peter Lang, 2005): 56.

¹⁷ W. M. Frohock, *The French Review* 47.2 (1973): 442.

¹⁸ Nick Aaron Ford, "The Ordeal of Richard Wright," *The Black American Writer*, ed. Donald Gibson (New York: 1970), n.pag, qtd. in Nina Kressner Cobb, "Richard Wright: Exile and Existentialism," *Phylon* (1960) 40.4 (1979): 362.

¹⁹ Graig L. Foster, *FARMS Review* 16.1 (2004): 150.

²⁰ It is the predominant religious tradition of Latter Day Saint movement of Restorationist Christianity. Joseph Smith founded this movement in Western New York in

1820's. The faith drew its first converts while Smith was dictating the text of the book of Mormon. (Accessed: 26 January 2016, Wikipedia.org)

Chapter Two

The For-Itself Burden: McCandless' Path Towards Authenticity

Existentialism has always been concerned with the condition of man in the world. Existentialists stressed on his status of an indifferent, meaningless existence. Under such circumstances, man is an alienated creature who experiences the feeling of estrangement. Life is pointless and the sense of meaninglessness suffocates him. Man does not find any answers. He either commits suicide, or accepts his wretched condition of following the herd and being one of the crowd. However, Sartre and associates offered a better solution, one in which man can live with dignity. Man can search for the meaning of his existence so as to define himself as he wills. Man can use his freedom to step out of all patterns of bad faith, or inauthentic existence, and eventually vivify his being through the modality of authenticity. In an essay he wrote in 1946, "Existentialism is a Humanism", Sartre responds to the claim that existentialism is a pessimistic philosophy, and that its theories and concepts express only anguish, dread, and anxiety. His reply is:

You have seen that it cannot be regarded as a philosophy of quietism since it defines man by his actions; nor as a pessimistic description of man, for no doctrine is more optimistic, the destiny of man is placed within himself. Nor is it an attempt to discourage man from action since it tells him that there is no hope except in his action, and that the one thing which permits him to have life is the deed. Upon his level therefore, what are we considering is an ethic of action and self-commitment.¹

This chapter aims at analysing Jon Krakauer's *Into the Wild* from an existential perspective. It is based on the idea that the protagonist Chris McCandless is an alienated person who does not feel affiliated with his society, and that he isolates himself so as not to conform to societal norms which he finds rather meaningless. It also encompasses the idea that the protagonist is a character who uses his freedom to define himself, stands responsible for all his deeds, and exists as an authentic human being. In so doing, the concepts to be applied are Sartre's alienation, freedom, and authenticity.

Taking this into consideration, this chapter will address the question of how and why can the protagonist of the novel be defined as an existential character? It also scouts the very appeal of the novel itself by addressing the question of how it can be regarded as a criticism of late twentieth century American way of life, conformity, and also the highly materialistic society of the time.

Into the wild is a novel that explores the experiences of a young protagonist searching for the meaning of his existence. This novel contains major alterations upon the American youthfulness presented through the character of Chris McCandless. Alongside the existential condition of the quest for the true identity and the attempt to create one's essence, several social as well as cultural matters are tackled in the novel.

1. Alienation:

In accordance with the existential thinking, individuals must confront the existing routine and the stream of challenges that are imposed upon them by their culture and their society. The protagonists of existential literature are usually alienated and non-conformist characters who do not accept to have a mere existence. Rather, they use their freedom to exist authentically. The protagonist of *Into the Wild* is a young man who does not approve

of living by the cultural standards. The circumstance of living under conformity suffocates him and estranges him from his family and his society.

The novel begins with Chris McCandless entering the Alaskan bush. In the first chapter, the writer basically starts with the events prior to the end of the story, and then it follows the protagonist's encounters, his relationship with his family, and also his arrival at the uninhabited wilderness where he faces a range of divergent experiences that eventually proved to be fatal.

The concept of alienation has been thoroughly explored in existential literature. In his article "ALIENATION AND EXISTENTIALISM IN RELATION TO LITERATURE AND YOUTH", Henry Winthrop mentions that "[t]he novels of existential writers like Sartre and Camus are powerful testimonials to the sufferings of men and women as a result of alienation in their lives"². Accordingly, McCandless is a character for whom alienation is the absolute verity. As a matter of fact, alienation is a concept that "refers to any psychological feeling of separation from persons, groups, institutions, ideas and ideals, places and things. It is characterized by an inability to experience a feeling of organic relatedness to any of these entities" (290).

Stuck in the meaninglessness of his entourage, McCandless finds himself in the situation of being afflicted by the shadows of estrangement from the people around him. As a little boy in the third year of primary education, Chris is very discrete a person. The pupils who are well educated and intelligent can have the opportunity to be placed in accelerated programs, and Chris is one of them: "[h]e was not happy about it,' ... he spent a week trying to get himself out of the program. This little boy [Chris] attempted to convince the teacher, the principal—anybody who would listen—that the test results were in error, that he really didn't belong there"³. His teacher notices that something strange is going on with him, and

decides to inform his parents that "Chris marches to a different drummer" (79). McCandless is not really interested in joining the program. His rejection to participate in the accelerated program intensifies his detachment and alienation.

McCandless always seeks isolation from the crowd. Despite the fact that he does experience the company of a few people, he prefers to be alone. He is not afflicted with false separatism. In fact, he prefers to be lonely rather than accompanying fake people or making meaningless conversations. One of his few friends Andy Horowitz "had mused that Chris 'was born into the wrong century. He was looking for more adventure and freedom than today's society gives people'" (124).

Unlike other people, McCandless perceives loneliness differently. Every time, he takes the opportunity to fulfil his desire of being alone. When McCandless goes to college in Atlanta, he keeps his way of exhibiting the mode of an alienated character. This is very clear in the novel where it is mentioned that "[d]uring that final year in Atlanta, Chris had lived off campus in a monkish room furnished with little more than a thin mattress on the floor, milk crates, and a table. He kept it as orderly and spotless as a military barracks. And he didn't have a phone, so Walt and Billie [his parents] had no way of calling him" (22).

After graduation from college, McCandless decides to go on an adventure for an ultimate quest of the meaning of existence. It is clear, then, that he is not happy with this mere existence. This is not the life he wants to live, and these are not the people whom he wants to be around. He saw college as the final four years of his imprisonment to his parents and their society's strict rules:

He had spent the previous four years, as he saw it, preparing to fulfil an absurd and onerous duty: to graduate from college. At long last he was unencumbered, emancipated from the stifling world of his parents and peers,

a world of abstraction and security and material excess, a world in which he felt grievously cut off from the raw throb of existence. (23)

Henry Winthrop also wrote in his article about the diverse forms of alienation. The alienation found in the novel is what Winthrop calls alienation of man from society. As he points out: "[a]uthors who deal with this theme are preoccupied with the tragic lives of men and women who are at odds with their society and its culture, who cannot accept either the ideas by which the average man in that society lives or the parochial loyalties he demands" (291).

Existential alienation, thus, could be experienced in several different ways. One might conceive oneself as a stranger when one sees to withdraw one's relatedness. In other words, alienation is defined by a person's feeling of discomfort and estrangement; discomfort from what a person may not feel affiliated with. McCandless is an alien individual because he feels the forms of discomfort and estrangement from society, from the sounds and lights of the city. While heading southwest, "McCandless went to Los Angeles 'to get a ID [sic] and a job but feels extremely uncomfortable in society now and must return to road immediately'" (Krakauer 32).

After several months of hitchhiking the US regions, McCandless sees to continue until he reaches the south-western state of Arizona. It is early October, and McCandless is overlooking the region of Bullhead City, Arizona. After a while, he decides to work on the grounds that this time would be a different experience. He takes on a humble job as a McDonald's employee. Despite being around people, McCandless holds his mode of separatism whether by staying alone or deeply in his own mentality. One of the assistant managers at work named Lori Zarza notices his alienation. She sees that he is a slow worker even in McDonald's' busiest days because he is deeply squandered in his own world. There

is no interdependency between them for the very reason that McCandless is always absent-minded and lost in his deep and thorough thinking (34).

The state of being alienated in the world indicates one's dissatisfaction with being what one is not. McCandless experiences this existential detachment as he distances himself from people he finds indifferent. As Zarza mentions: "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" (34).

Prior to his decision to leave his family and friends once and for all, McCandless experienced some happenings that bespeak his alienating character. In the summer before his freshman year of college, he decides to disappear for a while. After a long trip of total loneliness in the desert, he returns home quite thin with messy hair, and a long beard. After his return, his unsociable behaviour at the University of Emory becomes totally obvious. Eric Hathaway, one of his former friends clarifies:

'He [McCandless] seemed very introverted, almost cold. When I said 'Hey, good to see you, Chris,' his reply was cynical: 'Yeah, sure, that's what everybody says/ It was hard to get him to open up. ... Social life at Emory revolved around fraternities and sororities, something Chris wanted no part of. I think when everybody started going Greek, he kind of pulled back from his old friends and got more heavily into himself.' (89)

In his book, *Alienation and Freedom*, Richard Schmitt gives a thorough explanation of the existential concept of alienation. He argues:

Alienation arises when relations falter, when distrust separates persons who had earlier understood and trusted each other. Conversations become guarded and formal; feelings are concealed instead of being shared. One transfers

one's trust to other persons and perhaps even begins to malign those whom one had earlier defended warmly. Alienation, then, often refers to a growing estrangement between individual persons, to cooling affections, and to a loss of trust.⁴

When McCandless goes to El Se-gundo, California, the place where he spent all his childhood, he meets some old members of the family. Shortly after breaking off their colloquy, McCandless starts to query about his parents. At the end of the day, he becomes aware of his father's scandalous affair. His father, Walt McCandless, is a NASA scientist and radar specialist. Despite the fact that he is an intelligent man and a hard worker, Walt is no better father. He is so intense an individual, capricious, and often shows an unhappy manner of thought. Chris knows that his father had a double life for several years. Chris had been born to his mother, Billie, while his father was still married to his first wife, Marcia. And two years after Chris was born, Walt McCandless fathered another child with Marcia. Chris has in mind the truth that his father gave birth to him out of the wedlock, kept seeing the other women whom he divorced, and she gave birth to a child two years after Chris was born. Nonetheless, Chris keeps what he knows to himself and does not want to tell his parents. After this discovery, Chris sees his father as "*a. sanctimonious hypocrite*" (Krakauer 90, author's emphasis).

McCandless is alienated from his family because his father deceived him. Due to this fact, he becomes an emotionally alien individual. Eventually, he realizes that this is not the family he wants to belong to. His parents have successful careers, but they could not care about his sensitive mind. The lack of compassionate understanding from his family makes him a stranger. His willingness to leave his family indicates his indignation and discomfort. Chris perceives that "the deception committed by Walt and Billie made his 'entire childhood seem like a fiction'" (90). He feels suffocated by his parent's bourgeois demeanour, his

father's tyranny, and their lifestyle altogether. As he grouses to his sister Carine: "*I'm going to divorce them as my parents once and for all and never speak to either of those idiots again as long as I live. I'll through with them once and for all, forever*" (Author's emphasis 51). This situation manifests that Chris is an alienated character inwardly as well as outwardly.

In accordance with the existential tenets, alienation will always exist. Once man realizes the fact that he is an outsider in his own society, an outsider to the norms of his culture, he starts to forage for an absolute meaning and true existence. One can escape the status of being alienated by action towards dealienation. In his book, *Escaping Alienation: A Philosophy of Alienation and Dealienation*, Warren Frederick Morris claims that:

Dealienation begins when something is thought about, abstracted, analyzed and synthesized in various ways. As thought about the being in question moves from the unknown to the known, acquiring a structure of meaning. By being comprehended its alien character recedes. When fully comprehended, it may be changed in being and controlled in accordance with the desires and aims of the self. ... A dealienated world is one in which being is comprehended and even created by a freely active rational self. When something we want is created by us, it is what we are. It is an expression of who we are; our identity, if you will.⁵

McCandless is aware of his condition. He is not questioning his isolated character. Rather, he comprehends his will to move from the meaninglessness of his environment to a world of ultimate truthfulness and authenticity. He knows what he is running from as well as what he is looking for. McCandless certainly feels alienated from his family, friends, and the status of his life in general. This is seen in Ronald Franz' statement, an old man whom McCandless meets on his way to Alaska: "McCandless's face would darken with anger and

he'd fulminate about his parents or politicians or the endemic idiocy of mainstream American life" (Krakauer 42).

Morris goes forth and explicates the concept of alienation and its opposite, dealienation. He clarifies:

Where alienation is conceived as a specific kind of undesirable separation of self from something, possibly God or culture, successful dealienation is possible and in fact occurs. ... dealienation occurs continuously as alienating conditions are successfully dealt with by a human capacity for rational freedom. ... As long as life and history continues, there would always be some form of undesirable separation, an alien Other(s) to be confronted, limits presented, obstacles to the satisfaction of needs and desires. So, dealienation would be a perpetual aim with no termination, no finally achievable goal. Existentialists as widely divergent as Kierkegaard and Sartre believed this. (236)

McCandless tries to dealienate himself by leaving his former alienated life behind. Nevertheless, alienation will always exist. Whenever he goes, he inevitably confronts what he is fleeing in the first place. He finds that the people whom he meets in Bullhead City are nothing but phonies and shams. In the chapter of his experience in Bullhead City, "McCandless explained to Burres [a rubber tramp he met before his arrival at the City] that he'd grown tired of Bullhead, tired of punching a clock, tired of the 'plastic people' he worked with, and decided to get the hell out of town" (Krakauer 36).

Once again McCandless cuts himself off from society because he finds it inconvenient. McCandless' inability to be affiliated with the society confirms his alienation and asserts his ever-growing certitude that he does not want to join it. McCandless'

grandfather is a man who lives a quiet life far away from the monotony of life in the city, and does not focus his time and psychic energy on meaningless relationships. Walt McCandless believes that Chris is a version of his grandfather. This is seen in the novel where we can find that "'Billies dad [sic] didn't quite fit into society,' Walt explains. 'In many ways he and Chris were a lot alike'" (80).

In spite of the fact that he repeatedly faces alienating factors, McCandless never stops his attempt to find meaning within this indifferent world. As he sees society to be unsuitable for his principles, he decides to continue his adventure to the Alaskan bush. On his way, McCandless meets a delivery man named Stuckey. He demands if the man can give him a ride. Stuckey hesitates at first because he does not feel comfortable around hitchhikers. However, after conversing for a considerable amount of time, Stuckey decides to accept McCandless to ride with him. On the road, they start discussing the matter of going to Alaska, and McCandless confesses to the man that "'he didn't want to see a single person, no airplanes, no sign of civilization'" (114).

McCandless wants to escape to the secluded life in the wild. Distanced from society, he will not find himself in the situation of being obliged to communicate with fake and materialistic people. McCandless thus recognizes his existential separatism as well as his distinct approach to modern American life. He realizes that the perfect solution is to quit the American everydayness and live all alone in the wilderness. This typifies his stationary aim to prefer being alone rather than being associated with a society he does not approve of, or being afflicted with despair and conformity. That is to say, McCandless is a protagonist who exhibits the characteristics of an existential alienated hero.

Alienation will always exist. But one has to choose whether to live alienated in despair and anxiety, or to act towards the foundation of the true meaning of existence. If one

recognizes one's alienation and accepts being alienated without any action, one is lying to oneself and accepting to live an unwanted life. McCandless is not such a character. Wherever he goes he confronts with alienation. In every place he finds himself alienated from its people. But he never lets himself fall under the shells of conformism. Rather, he keeps trying to create an essence for his existence. The latter is referred to as using one's freedom in order to be authentic.

2. Freedom and Authenticity:

Existentialism is based on the conceptions that man is free, free to choose and live by his own principles, and also use his freedom to try and find a meaning for his existence. Man should use his freedom to overcome and step out of the inauthentic sphere of cultural limitations. Thus, freedom and authenticity are two of the core central concepts of existential philosophy.

In *Into the Wild*, McCandless is a protagonist who does what he prefers to do. His actions are self-governed, and they show his non-conformist character. At school, the physics teacher asks the students to write the lab reports "in a particular format to make grading them a manageable proposition. Chris thought it was a stupid rule and decided to ignore it. He did his lab reports, but not in the correct format, so the teacher gave him an F" (81).

One of the major existential principles that were introduced by Sartre is that existence precedes, and does not follow essence. That is to say, "man first of all exists, encounters himself, surges up in the world—and defines himself afterwards. ... Man is nothing else but that which he makes of himself" ("Existentialism is a Humanism" 349). On his way to Alaska, McCandless "wanted to prove to himself that he could make it on his own, without

anybody else's help" (Krakauer 114). McCandless is a man whose actions do not concern social expectations. He rejects to be associated with all cultural banalities. He wants to make himself, to define himself upon his choices. Although he was born in a twentieth century capitalist society, McCandless "believed that wealth was shameful, corrupting, inherently evil" (85).

In his article, "Existentialism", Maximilian Beck explains the importance of living as one wills, but not as external attributes impose:

Man should not direct his life intelligently according to objective aspects or through cautious calculations of universal possibilities, but he must try to realise his own, very individual and never definable finiteness, always running the risk of wrecking his life in the attempt to transcend the limits of his finiteness; yet this is the only way of self-realization. Unless one does this, one does not really 'exist,' which means that one is not really oneself, but represents merely the impersonal mass of the general public ('publicum'), in whose clichés one thinks, feels, wills, acts, and feels at ease.⁶

In the novel Krakauer states that "[t]he meaning he [McCandless] wrested from existence lay beyond the comfortable path: McCandless distrusted the value of things that came easily" (131). This is also seen when McCandless's parents try to convince him to go to college in order to pursue a successful career as everyone else would do, but he responds that "careers were demeaning 'twentieth-century inventions,' more of a liability than an asset, and that he would do fine without one, thank you" (84). It is then clear that McCandless is a mutinous character who rebels against the commercialist and materialistic culture of modern society. He does not blindly follow the paths of his peers. He makes his way to a real self-realization by defining his individuality outside the cultural norms.

In his life, McCandless does not feel any relatedness. He is isolated from the American commonness. What Sartre believes is that man can make his own rules, live by his own standards, and set his own ideals. This takes only a genuine commitment:

Commitment refers to the individual's ability to develop a philosophy of life and a set of ideals by which to guide his own destiny. This, of course, what Sartre has in mind when he says that man defines his own essence. There are two preconditions for doing this successfully. One is to attempt to create a personal identity for oneself which shall not consist of incompatible fragments. This means that some old rules are abandoned and some new ones entered into ... The other precondition is that we think deeply and honestly about the values, ideals, and ideas which make life more worthwhile to us and that we learn to arrange our values in a hierarchy of importance for ourselves. (Winthrop 293-94, author's emphasis)

While heading west, McCandless thinks of liberating himself. It is an opportunity for him to withdraw a world defined by obligation and authority, a world in which he perceives nothingness, a lack of meaning, and absurdity. Fed up with his existence that leads to an endless chasm, McCandless assumes a new identity. As Krakauer states:

Driving west out of Atlanta he intended to invent an utterly new life for himself, one in which he would be free to wallow in unfiltered experience. To symbolize the complete severance from his previous life, he even adopted a new name. No longer would he answer to Chris McCandless; he was now Alexander Super-tramp, master of his own destiny. (23)

By assuming a new name, McCandless withdraws his former life, his friends, and his own family. By the act of creating his own universe, McCandless would be regarded as the

prototype of authentic existence. This act is an expression of his absolute freedom. It can be viewed as his complete rebirth. He now has a world of possibilities before him.

Man is totally free, but only if he resigns himself to the fact that he has a facticity. Richard Grivil points out that "[y]our life is made up of *facticity* and *possibility*: your facticity is present and objective, while your possibility is (yet) to be"⁷ (Author's emphasis). This is also explained by Sartre as he states that "the facticity of freedom is the given which it has to *be* and which it illuminates by its project. ... It is *my place, my body, my past, my position* in so far as it is already determined by the indications of Others"⁸ (Author's emphasis). What facticity here means is that there are some existing facts in the world that cannot be changed. Facticity is the limitation of one's freedom. One cannot choose to be born in such place and not another. One cannot choose to be tall or short. One can never change one's past. Yet, if there is anything essential in the world that can be changed, it is to have the ability to define one's essence. McCandless did not choose to be born in such family. He did not choose to live in a careless society. But he is working on characterising his essence, and giving his existence whatever meaning he chooses. He is setting himself free.

In an indifferent world, one is compelled to choose, compelled to be self-interpreting. In a meaningless atmosphere, there is no inbred meaning to human beings. That is to say, one is free to give one's life whatever meaning one chooses: "[m]an makes himself; he is not found ready-made; he makes himself by the choice of his morality, and he cannot but choose a morality, such is the pressure of circumstances upon him" ("Existentialism is a Humanism" 364-65). McCandless does assume the existential mode that man makes himself throughout his choices. On January 1992, he meets an eighty year old man called Ron Franz at the desert of Salton City. The man is very talkative. He starts asking McCandless about his name and his family, but McCandless says that his name is Alex, and that he has no family. The man begins to worry about his condition being homeless in the desert, no home, no money, and

no family. McCandless turns to him and says: "you don't need to worry about me. I have a college education. I'm not destitute. I'm living like this by choice" (Krakauer 41). It seems like McCandless is happy about his life as long as he chooses to live it as he wills.

While driving west, McCandless reaches Lake Mead National Recreation Area which is located in south-western Nevada. On the road, McCandless passes by several warning posts that driving off of designated roads, in washes, is prohibited by National Park Service regulations. Nevertheless, McCandless disregards every post he sees, and deliberately drives in the washes to satisfy his desire of breaking laws and showing his ultimate freedom of action. He does not care about rules and restrictions. His actions are spontaneous and self-governed. As Sartre states: "[f]or if indeed existence precedes essence, one will never be able to explain one's action by reference to a given and specific human nature; in other words, there is no determinism—man is free, man *is* freedom" ("Existentialism is a Humanism" 353, author's emphasis). In Topock, Arizona, "he noticed a secondhand aluminum canoe for sale and on an impulse decided to buy it and paddle it down to the Colorado River to the Gulf of California, nearly four hundred miles to the south, across the borders with Mexico" (Krakauer 29). Although McCandless knows that he is supposed to have a government permit so as to be able to paddle across the river, he did not get one. He eventually finds himself under the circumstance of an unlawful entry into the American military installations area, Yuma Proving Ground. He disregards all warning posts and ignorantly encroaches on the area (29). McCandless, then, is a rebel against the environment. His acts are direct responses to his own society which are interpreted in violating governmental laws.

McCandless can be viewed as a free character whose aim is to flee the inauthentic routine of American lifestyle, the life of conformity and material excess. Sartre claims that "[s]ince freedom is choice, it is change" (*Being and Nothingness* 638). This is noticed in a

postcard which McCandless sent to Ronald Franz, the eighty-year-old man whom he meets on the road. McCandless tries to explicate the state of being totally free, and making a change of his lifestyle. At the same time, he wants Mr Franz to do the same. McCandless writes:

I think you really should make a radical change in your lifestyle and begin to boldly do things which you may previously never have thought of doing, or been too hesitant to attempt. So many people live within unhappy circumstances and yet will not take the initiative to change their situation because they are conditioned to a life of security, conformity, and conservatism, all of which may appear to give one peace of mind, but in reality nothing is more damaging to the adventurous spirit within a man than a secure future. ... The joy of life comes from our encounters with new experiences, and hence there is no greater joy than to have an endlessly changing horizon, for each day to have a new and different sun. If you want to get more out of life, Ron, You must lose your inclination for monotonous security and adopt a helter-skelter style of life that will at first appear to you to be crazy. But once you become accustomed to such a life you will see its full meaning and its incredible beauty. (Krakauer 45, author's emphasis)

It is clarified by Sartre that "the formula 'to be free' does not mean 'to obtain what one has wished' but rather 'by oneself to determine oneself to wish' (in broad sense of choosing). In other words success is not important to freedom" (*Being and Nothingness* 621). Here, Sartre means that man is not his job, nor how much money he has in the bank. Man is neither the car he drives, nor his success. If one lives in a society in which people possess all these things, great. But if one does not have a choice in having them, one is just conditioned to have them because the society says so. In a capitalist society, man is allowed to purchase

his identity rather than building it from scratch. By leaving home, McCandless shows his ability to choose the life he wants:

He could simply abandon the Datsun [his car] and resume his odyssey on foot. ... He buried his Winchester deer-hunting rifle ... he arranged all his paper currency in a pile on the sand—a pathetic little stack of ones and fives and twenties—and put a much to it. One hundred twenty-three dollars in legal tender was promptly reduced to ash and smoke. (Krakauer 26)

By abandoning his car and burning all his money, McCandless is declaring his rebirth, and with rebirth comes new life. He acknowledges the fact that the objects he owns do not define who he is. He denies the basal presumptions of urbanization and the significance of material procurements. McCandless wants to destroy the false comforts of American society. By so doing, he exhibits his freedom of choice.

Existentialism longs for originality, creativity, and freedom of choice. As Van Meter Ames puts it:

The existentialist holds in effect that only the artist, or a person living like an artist, is really living; that the man who is adjusted to business and industry in a mechanized world is a coward, because he is avoiding the burden of freedom. By accepting the rules of the game and going along with the world he gets out of making real choices and decisions. This is unworthy of man. Authentic existence begins with the rejection of conventions, with the will to rely on one's own choice and to renew it at each step. The existential ideal is to live as if nothing were settled, in perpetual doubt. The hero is the artist who shakes off habits, teachings and achievements, in continual revolt against whatever would confine or control him.⁹

Sartre despises people who prefer role regulated societies where everything is timed to the minute; people who live their lives precisely as expected. Soren Kierkegaard also criticised such existence. He refers to such people as the crowd or the philistines. Dave Robinson argues that "[m]ost people follow the normal practices of their society. If the society is Christian, then they go to church. If it is communist, then they dutifully attend party meetings"¹⁰. Robinson sought to include another description of the crowd. He states: "[t]hey are contented members of the 'public' but lack any real personal freedom, because they have allowed others to decide how they should live" (39). McCandless does not accept to be one of the crowd, he draws his path according to his principles. After his graduation, McCandless is expected to do what every excellent graduate would do, to go to law school with the twenty-four dollar that he has in his account. But McCandless "would shortly donate all the money in his college fund to OXFAM America, a charity dedicated to fighting hunger" (Krakauer21).

Prior to his departure, McCandless "announced to his parents that, on principle, he would no longer give or accept gifts" (21). By donating his college fund and rejecting to go to law school, then by abandoning his car and burning his money, McCandless confirms that these particulars do not own him. By not pursuing a respectable career and a successful future, he makes an attempt of destroying the notion of social norms, 'an American dream'. He finds a way out of his former wretched existence with hitchhiking, being homeless, experiencing days of hunger, thirst, and loneliness. He leaves a world which demands conformity, a world of emptiness and futility. McCandless is a character who breaks out of the societal barriers that most people comply with. He is one of the few who actually live outside norms and settled codes. He is affirming his individualism. It is his affirmation that he is truly alive. Hence, McCandless is a free and authentic individual.

According to the existential terms of Sartre, there are two modes of being: being-for-itself and being-in-itself. Walter Kaufmann clarifies that "[t]he *en-soi* (in-itself) is in Sartre's thought the being which rests in itself, the being of such things as tables. The *pour-soi* (for-itself) is that being which is aware of itself: man"¹¹ (Author's emphasis). While self-conscious human beings exist, non-conscious objects just are. If the for-itself refuses to use its freedom, it exists in the mode of being-in-itself. In other words, if man hides from the burden of his freedom, "he is afraid of freedom, openness, and change and longs to be as solid as a thing. He wants an identity, he wants to be something in the manner in which a table is something, or a rock. ... the man has achieved nothing less than an escape from freedom: he has abdicated his humanity" (44). McCandless refuses to exist as being-in-itself; rather, he uses his freedom to act according to his terms; to exist in the mode of being-for-itself.

Sartre believes man to be totally free; free that he cannot cease to be free: "I am condemned to exist forever beyond my essence, beyond the causes and motives of my act. I am condemned to be free" (*Being and Nothingness* 567). In other words, man must be free. It is not up to him to cease being free. Man can only choose not to use his freedom to live without choice. Man is condemned to be free. When man chooses the path of security and live under the patterns of conformism, man is afraid of using his freedom. He is hiding from his freedom and accepting to live as if his life has already been written for him. He is not the author of his actions. He is a coward. Sartre argues that "[t]hose who hide from this total freedom, in a guise of solemnity or with deterministic excuses, I shall call cowards. Others, who try to show that their existence is necessary, when it is merely an accident of the appearance of the human race on earth—I shall call scum" ("Existentialism is a Humanism" 366). McCandless is neither a coward nor a scum. He is an utter hero in the face of his socio-cultural ties. He is not afraid of being free nor avoiding the burden of freedom. As he states:

"[t]he freedom and simple beauty of it is just too good to pass up" (Kraakauer 30, author's emphasis).

Falsehood, self-deception, and bad faith are all patterns of inauthentic being. Authenticity is a major concern of existentialism. Many existentialists such as Sartre, Kierkegaard, and Heidegger gave their thoughts about authentic life, and how should one prevent oneself from falling in the patterns of bad faith. In fact, "all of them contrast inauthentic life and authentic life" (Kaufmann 50). Sartre defined bad faith as "not restricted to denying the qualities which I possess, to not seeing the being which I am. It attempts also to constitute myself as being what I am not" (*Being and Nothingness* 111).

In order to thoroughly explicate the status of bad faith, and the mode of being what one is not, Sartre illustrated the latter by describing a café waiter along with all tradesmen:

His movement is quick and forward, a little too precise, a little too rapid. He comes toward the patrons with a step a little too quick. He bends forward a little too eagerly; his voice, his eyes express an interest a little too solicitous for the order of the customer. ... He applies himself to chaining his movements as if they were mechanisms, the one regulating the other; his gestures and even his voice seem to be mechanisms; he gives himself the quickness and pitiless rapidity of things. ... This obligation is not different from that which is imposed on all tradesmen. ... The public demands of them that they realize it as a ceremony; there is the dance of the grocer, of the tailor, of the auctioneer, by which they endeavour to persuade their clientele that they are nothing but a grocer, an auctioneer, a tailor. (102)

What Sartre wants to say is that these individuals have forgotten about their identity as human beings. They are human beings, but they are being what they are not i.e. a café waiter,

a grocer, a tailor, and an auctioneer. Sartre continues to explain the condition of the café waiter;

I cannot be he [café waiter], I can only play *at being him*; that is, imagine to myself that I am he. What I attempt to realize is a being-in-itself of the café waiter, as if it were not just in my power to confer their value and their urgency upon my duties and the rights of my position, as if it were not my free choice to get up each morning at five o'clock or to remain in bed, even though it meant getting fired. ... I am a waiter in the mode of *being what I am not*. (Author's emphasis 103)

Sartre does not mean that the café waiter should come at work too late, or that he must quit his job. The thing is that the café waiter is embodying the identity of a café waiter. His job as a waiter defines who he is. His job owns him to the extent that he sees himself as a café waiter, but not as a human being. He is detained in the identity of a waiter. He is neglecting the freedom of his individuality. Every move he makes is much like that of a waiter. He is a waiter precisely as the customer wants him to be. For this, it can be said that the waiter is not free because he exists in the mode of being what he is not, a café waiter. In fact, he can have the choice of only working as a waiter, but at the same time acts independently. He can be free to transcend his job and exist in the mode of being what he really is, a human being. Thus, the café waiter is not a free agent, nor does he live authentically.

The situation of the café waiter is also explored in the character of McCandless. When McCandless arrives at Bullhead City, he finds a job as a McDonald's employee. George Dreeszen, an assistant manager says:

'He [McCandless] always wore shoes without socks- just plain couldn't wear appropriate socks. But McDonald's has a rule that employees have to wear

appropriate footwear at all times. That means shoes and socks. Chris would comply with the rule, but as soon as his shift was over, bang!-the first thing he'd do is peel those socks off. I mean the very first thing. Kind of like a statement, to let us know we didn't own him, I guess.' (Krakauer 34)

Another assistant manager named Lori Zarza says sees that McCandless is a really slow worker in any situation. Due to his wretched condition of being homeless, McCandless thinks that it is not necessary to bath. Against McDonald's standards, he comes at work so filthy. When the manager starts to upbraid him for his slovenly appearance, McCandless directly decides to quit his job and leave. (34-35)

It is obvious that McCandless can never accept losing his identity. Unlike the café waiter, McCandless' acts are made upon his own standards. He freely does what he wants to do without any consideration towards the people he works with, or what they could think of him. He does not resign his individualism to McDonald's rules. When they wanted him to abide by their standards, he directly quit. His job cannot, in any way, define his being. He is the master of his own life. That is to say, McCandless is a free as well as authentic character.

Sartre was the prodigy of twentieth century France. With his literary and philosophical writings, Sartre undoubtedly attracted the herd. Since 1901, every profound literary work would be awarded due to the excellency of both the words of its pages, and the author who put ink to them. Well known writers won the acclaimed Swedish award, the Noble Prize in Literature. In 1964, Sartre was one of the writers nominated for winning the Nobel Prize. However, surprisingly, Sartre had his reasons for refusing to accept it. Charles Guignon points out that "[i]n 1964, he [Sartre] refused to accept the Nobel Prize for literature on the grounds that such prizes tend to turn writers into institutions"¹². McCandless expresses his freedom of choice in almost the same way as Sartre did: "[h]e [McCandless] was offered

membership in Phi Beta Kappa [the honour society for the liberal arts and sciences in the United States] but declined, insisting that titles and honors are irrelevant" (Krakauer 21). This act shows McCandless' powerful will to preserve his moral independency of action. Like Sartre, McCandless does not want to associate himself with the membership, and in turn he exhibits his total, unlimited freedom.

After his arrival at Alaska, McCandless decides to scribble a passage that can describe his joy of being free. He dashes off:

*TWO YEARS HE WALKS THE EARTH, NO PHONE, NO POOL, NO PETS,
NO CIGARETTES. ULTIMATE FREEDOM. AN EXTREMIST.
ANAESTHETIC VOYAGER WHOSE HOME IS THE ROAD. ESCAPED
FROM ATLANTA. THOU SHALT NOT RETURN, 'CAUSE "THE WEST IS
THE BEST. " AND NOW AFTER TWO RAMBLING YEARS COMES THE
FINAL AND GREATEST ADVENTURE. THE CLIMACTIC BATTLE TO
KILL THE FALSE BEING WITHIN AND VICTORIOUSLY CONCLUDE
THE SPIRITUAL REVOLUTION. TEN DAYS AND NIGHTS OF FREIGHT
TRAINS AND HITCHHIKING BRING HIM TO THE GREAT WHITE
NORTH. NO LONGER TO BE POISONED BY CIVILIZATION HE FLEES,
AND WALKS ALONE UPON THE LAND TO BECOME LOST IN THE
WILD. (Author's emphasis 117)*

Notwithstanding the harsh condition he has been through, McCandless is declaring his peak of freedom. And as all existentialists would agree with, McCandless's only interest is the experience itself. He is happy with his situation because it is self-governed. He guides his life as he wills.

McCandless exists through unprompted experiences. He is the judge of his moves. His deeds elucidate his authenticity. He writes and creates his life by his own actions. In congruence with Sartre's existential views, "[l]ife is nothing until it is lived; but it is yours to make sense of, and the value of it is nothing else but the sense that you choose" ("Existentialism is a Humanism" 367-68). Likewise, McCandless lives in accordance with his own standards. Mrs Westerberg, the mother of a farmer named Wayne Westerberg whom McCandless meets and stays several days at his place. As she confesses: "[u]nlike most of us, he was the sort of person who insisted on living his beliefs" (Krakauer 53).

In regards to all these instances, and in the light of Sartrean existential thought, it is obvious that *Into the Wild* is a literary work that puts emphasis on human experience beyond commercialism, materialism, and conformism. It stresses freedom of choice and authenticity. It reminds a life experience against what is perceived in modern society. In a meaningless world, *Into the Wild* demonstrates the three existential concepts, namely alienation, freedom, and authenticity. It concerns the condition of a protagonist in search of his true identity. Thus, Chris McCandless, or Alexander Super-tramp, McCandless is an utter existential hero. He perfectly exhibits his freedom. He is the author of his own destiny. In this sense, he is an utterly authentic character. By illustrating the experience of a total maverick, Krakauer is presenting a criticism of late twentieth century American lifestyle. He sends his unsatisfactory viewpoint through the acts of his protagonist. That is to say, *Into the wild* is a novel that perfectly embodies the existential tenets of Jean-Paul Sartre. Hence, it can be regarded as an existential piece of literature.

Apart from Sartre's atheistic existential conceptions, Martin Buber was a Jewish existentialist who introduced salient concepts to the twentieth century philosophy. His concerns were the way people treat each other and their status of living under the shells of a mere existence which is defined by objectification and categorization. Buber's concepts were

a reaction to such societal issues for better communities and authentic relationships. These are the ideas that the next chapter will address.

Endnotes and References:

¹ Jean-Paul Sartre, "Existentialism is a Humanism," trans. Walter Kaufman, *Existentialism From Dostoevsky to Sartre*, ed. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Penguin, 1975): 360.

² Henry Winthrop, "ALIENATION AND EXISTENTIALISM IN RELATION TO LITERATURE AND YOUTH," *The Journal of General Education* 18.4 (1967): 289.

³ Jon Krakauer, *Into the Wild* (New York: Random House, 1996): 79.

⁴ Richard Schmitt, *Alienation and Freedom* (Colorado: Westview press, 2003): 1.

⁵ Warren Frederick Morris, *Escaping Alienation: A Philosophy of Alienation and Dealienation* (Lanham: University Press of America, 2002): 33.

⁶ Maximilian Beck, "Existentialism," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 5.1 (1944): 128.

⁷ Richard Grivil, *Existentialism* (Tirril: Humanities-Ebooks, 2007): 8.

⁸ Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, trans. Hazel E. Barnes (New York: Washington Square Press, 1984): 629.

⁹ Van Meter Ames, "Existentialism and the Arts," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 9.3 (1951): 253.

¹⁰ Dave Robinson, *Introducing Kierkegaard*, illus. Oscar Zarate, ed. Richard Appignanesi (Cambridge: Icon Books, 2006): 38.

¹¹ Walter Kaufmann, ed. *Existentialism From Dostoevsky to Sartre* (New York: Penguin, 1975): 43.

¹² Charles Guignon, Introduction, *The Existentialists: Critical Essays on Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Heidegger, and Sartre*, by Guignon (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2004): 12.

Chapter Three

I-Thou and I-It: Authentic Existence is Relational

Existentialism embraces different tenets that were introduced by manifold philosophers. From Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Heidegger, to Sartre, de Beauvoir, and Camus. Kierkegaard was an anti-Christianity Christian, and Nietzsche was considered the anti-Christ in regards to his claim that God is dead. When it comes to Heidegger, it can be said that atheistic existential philosophy began in his period. In the time of Sartre and de Beauvoir, existentialism took a different path. Sophists in the existential tradition tend to have the reputation for being atheistic and individualistic. Nevertheless, existentialism did not only encompass non-religious figures who explained their concepts beyond the terms of religion, but there existed another type of existentialism: religious existentialism.

Despite being Christian, Kierkegaard opposed the terms of his church. Nonetheless, he was considered a religious existentialist. One of the prominent intellectuals of religious philosophy in the twentieth century was Martin Buber. Buber was an Austrian theologian and philosopher from Jewish origins. He wrote in both German and Hebrew. His contribution to the western philosophy could only be praised. He is best known for his remarkable piece *Ich und Du*, a philosophical book written in German and published in 1923. The book was then translated to English by Ronald Gregor Smith as *I and Thou*, and by Walter Kaufmann as *I and You*. Buber's writings proved to make a considerable impact on a series of diverse fields such as philosophy, religion, and also psychology. His works perfectly implicate a myriad of profound thoughts that directly reflect his being a man of outstanding intellect.

Buber's *I and Thou* examines the utter actuality of human beings. It discusses the very meaning of human existence. In his *Being and Nothingness*, Sartre explicates the patterns of inauthentic existence, and how one can overcome this condition by using one's freedom and hence becoming authentic. In like manner, Buber tackles the absolute basis for an authentic existence in *I and Thou*. Buber believes that a genuine as well as meaningful existence resides in relationships. Buber's major concern is the way human beings address each other. According to Buber, relationships are denoted by two basic word pairs, 'I-It' and 'I-Thou'. An 'I-It' relationship refers to the treatment of others as existing as any other objects rather than human beings. By way of contrast, an 'I-Thou' relationship is built upon authenticity and the treatment of human beings for who they really are.

In his essay, "Existentialism is a Humanism", Sartre asserts that "[e]xistentialism is not atheist in the sense that it would exhaust itself in demonstrations of the non-existence of God. It declares, rather, that even if God existed that would make no difference from its point of view"¹. Buber, on the other hand, was a religious man who believed in the existence of God as the eternal Thou. But despite his being religious, Buber's philosophy illustrates the view that human beings can enter into genuine relationships. His concern is to put emphasis on the liaison between individuals. Moreover, Buber's philosophy is regarded as an ethical proposition to overshadow the patterns of inauthentic existence, and form a better community through genuine relationships.

This chapter, thus, aims not to gesture towards the distinction between Sartre's atheistic and Buber's theistic versions of existentialism, but rather to shed light on Buber's concepts of 'I-It' and 'I-Thou'. The objective is to interpret the novel applying the Buberian concepts of existential philosophy. It stands on the idea that the protagonist Chris McCandless lives and experiences Buber's two realms of relationships throughout his experiences as well as his encounters. This chapter will show that true existence resides on

authentic relationships with others rather than being alienated and isolated. It will explore the Buberian existential concepts in order to reach the ideal that authentic existence is to encounter and build genuine relations with human beings.

In this principle, this chapter will address several questions. It will examine the fact whether McCandless is an authentic existential character who is capable of entering into relationships with the other characters in the novel. What does he realise at the end of the novel? The chapter will also scrutinize Krakauer's opinion of his own society's relations. Does he criticise the modern American world of relationships through the encounters of his protagonist?

In *I and Thou*, Buber incorporates a thorough caption about the very gist of his existential conceptions. He describes the status of man, his existence, his attitude, and his actions. As it is pointed in his assertion:

To man the world is twofold, in accordance with his twofold attitude. The attitude of man is twofold, in accordance with the twofold nature of the primary words which he speaks. The primary words are not isolated words, but combined words. The one primary word is the combination *I-Thou*. The other primary word is the combination *I-It* ... Primary words do not signify things, but they intimate relations.² (Author's emphasis)

What Buber wants to draw upon is that man can enter into two worlds of interaction. Man can associate into two realms of relationships. This duple realm of relations is referred to as 'I-It' and 'I-Thou' relationships.

In his article, "I-Thou and I-It", W. Taylor Stevenson raises out a simplification of Buber's concepts. As he clarifies:

Man's attitude and consequently his actions, are twofold in that they can be understood in terms either of the primary word I-It, which designates a relationship characterised by objectification, categorization, and utilization; or the primary word I-Thou, which designates a relationship characterised by betweenness, presentness, and uniqueness.³

This very clarification lays out a perspective that human beings can built relationships that are based on objectification which means that man views others as objects to be observed as well as experienced. This relationship is based on categorization in which human beings are defined by what they represent rather than by who they really are as persons. This 'I-It' relationship is also interpreted as the unethical behaviour towards others in terms of treatment which is based on using others as objects for personal gain. In contrast, the primary word 'I-Thou' refers to genuine relationships that are based on accepting human beings for who they really are. 'I-Thou' relationship is where authenticity and truthfulness reside. It is based on mutuality, trust, and the correct treatment of human beings.

In sundry books as well as articles the 'Thou' is referred to as the 'You'. In accordance with Walter Kaufmann's translation *I and You*, the first primary word is referred to as 'I-You' and the other primary word is referred to as 'I-It'. The main distinction is that some writers relied on Kaufmann's translation on the grounds that the 'Thou' is a classical word used in biblical passages, and the 'You' is more relevant. Nonetheless, both words do not misreport the account of Buber's philosophy, and are both accurate.

According to Buber, the 'Thou' precedes the 'It'. That is to say, 'I-Thou' relationship is arrantly innate. 'I-It' relationship comes through the realization of one's capability of objectification. In their book, *Martin Buber's I and Thou*, Kenneth Kramer and Mechthild Gawlick wrote:

Through seeing, hearing, and touching, writes Buber, a child finds his or her own world. The 'inborn Thou' expresses itself as the child reaches out for contact. According to Buber, the 'inborn Thou' manifests only through entering into relationship with another Thou. As the child becomes conscious of 'I,' by learning to perceive his or her separateness from what is reached for (whether a teddy bear or a tea pot), the child learns to form objectifying relationships.⁴

According to Sartre, when one is not being what one really is, and resigns oneself to the situation of accepting to exist as a puppet in the hands of cultural limitations, one is neither free nor authentic. Hence, one exists as an object, or as Sartre calls it, being-in-itself. The concept of Buber is, to some degree, akin to that of Sartre's. However, whilst Sartre argues that man exists as an object only because he allows himself to be so, Buber believes that in fact it is people who treat each other as objects. They view each other as 'Its' rather than 'Thous'. In other words, this mere existence is relational rather than individualistic. 'I-It' relationship leads to alienation and emptiness, for it is partial, and one of the parties does not listen, nor present their whole being. Clancy Martin professes that "[i]n reaction to this alienation, the I of the I-It relation may abandon selfhood altogether, and the person experiencing life in this way may come to see himself as an It"⁵. In this principle, McCandless is alienated from his family and society because he does not find authenticity in their sphere. His detachment from his family is a prototype of an 'I-It' relationship. That is to say, in such inauthentic atmosphere, McCandless sees himself as an 'It' amongst them.

In the modern world, societies are defined by material affluence; interactions are neither genuine nor spontaneous, and relationships are based on personal needs. Human beings do not communicate with the presence of their whole beings. They merely see or listen to each other. There is no betweenness, no mutuality, and no attention. Buber's

philosophy was a direct response to such existence. McCandless is alienated because his family does not understand him. They do not listen to him nor respect his decisions. They neglect his voice as a human being. In this sense, Garifallia Doriza writes: "[a]s a remedy for this overwhelming alienation, Buber prescribes the establishment of dialogue which leads to the dialogical community and to the absolute Thou"⁶. As materialistic parents, Walt and Billie do not see the true being of their son. McCandless keeps reminding them that he does not want to accept nor give any gifts. Yet, they insist on buying him a new car despite the fact that he already has one. He finds himself in the position of existing as an object, for he is neither heard nor understood. As he complains, *"I've told them a million times that I have the best car in the world ... yet they ignore what I say and think I'd actually accept any gifts from them! I'm going to have to be real careful not to accept any gifts from them in the future because they will think they have bought my respect"*⁷ (Author's emphasis). This instance concludes that there is no real, dialogical communication between Chris and his family. Their relation is partial and not whole. They are in the mode of 'I-It' relationship. If there was a direct communication, they would know that their son does not like material aspects.

Buber's existentialism is known as the dialogical philosophy in regard of its concern about and emphasis on relationship, encounter, and communication.

Dialogue is not therapy: it does not require 'telling all,' although it does require engagement *with* another person or persons. To engage in dialogue one needs a modicum of trust and some degree of relationship with another person, although paradoxically, dialogue grows out of, and aids in, the development of both trust and relationships.⁸ (Author's emphasis)

McCandless' relationship with his family is never stabilized. He bears their constant ignorance of his word. However, when he learns about his father's double marriage, McCandless loses every ounce of trust he has for his parents. He despises them for keeping the incident as their secret for so many years, and also for his father's unethical deed. Unlike 'I-Thou' realm of relationships, 'I-It' relationships demolish every ounce of intimacy. They falter authentic communication between people. 'I-It' basic word pair is, to a considerable extent, discerned in the life of modern society (Doriza 314). It is obvious then that McCandless and his family are into the realm of the 'I-It'. There is no trust, no intimacy, and certainly no authentic, successful dialogical communication. This is seen in McCandless' own words describing his father as "*a. sanctimonious hypocrite*" (Krakauer 90, author's emphasis).

As an alienated character, McCandless feels suffocated by the entourage of the I-It relationship with his family, and also the status of modern society that is conditioned to materialism and objectification. As Richard Schmitt argues: "[s]imple alienation follows specific events, and it is specific: Distanced from persons or groups, one remains free to find other nourishing relations"⁹. Eventually, McCandless decides to withdraw his relationship with his parents, and leave their inane and meaningless world. As a matter of fact, McCandless did not leave for building better relationships with other people. He wants to complete his odyssey which is reaching the Alaskan bush, and live far from civilization. He does not intent to meet any person. In this case, Buber confirms that "[t]he Thou meets me through grace-it is not found by seeking" (11). Buber tries to clarify that 'I-Thou' relationships are not necessarily built upon one's commitment, or will to make them, or even by one's act to deliberately generate them; rather, they just happen when they happen. One has to think authentically towards any person. For instance, two strangers in a bus who do not know each other, nor do they have any held information about their past or personal life.

When these two strangers meet through grace, make a successful communication with no judgements, no categorization, and truly listen and be there as whole beings, these two strangers are being authentic into the realm of 'I-Thou' relationship.

Buber sees that authenticity lies in encounter as well as communication. As he affirms: "[a]ll real living is meeting" (11). That is to say, McCandless meets several people throughout his journey but not by seeking. After his arrival at Carthage, South Dakota, McCandless meets Wayne Westerberg, "a hyperkinetic man with thick shoulders and a black goatee, owns a grain elevator in Carthage and another one a few miles out of town" (Krakauer 19). Surprisingly, McCandless finds that Westerberg is good company and decides to stay with him. McCandless meets the other employees and spends a considerable amount of time in Carthage. Stuart Charmé wrote that "I-Thou relation refers to an intimate, caring relation which accepts another person for what he is"¹⁰. Undoubtedly, McCandless feels quite at home in the company of Westerberg. He never judges McCandless or questions him about the condition of his life. He just accepts him for who he really is as a person. As Krakauer states: "[i]f McCandless felt estranged from his parents and siblings, he found a surrogate family in Westerberg and his employees" (20).

McCandless then leaves Carthage and continues the life of hitchhiking. At Arcata, California, he meets Jan Burres and her boyfriend Bob, two rubber tramps traveling the west. Again, McCandless decides to camp with the couple and spend some time with them. In 'I-Thou' relationship there is always a mutuality, a reciprocal feeling between the 'I' and its 'Thou'. According to Buber, "[r]elation is mutual. My Thou affects me, as I affect it" (15). It is clear that McCandless and Burres have mutual affection on each other. As Burres admits, McCandless "'was a really good kid. We thought the world of him'" (Krakauer 28). Likewise, "McCandless was especially attentive to Burres, flirting and clowning with her at every opportunity" (37).

Notwithstanding these genuine relations, McCandless leaves the couple and keeps heading on his Alaskan odyssey. In Bullhead City, Arizona, McCandless takes a job as a McDonald's employee. Satinder P. Gill states that in an 'I-It' relationship "[w]e often view people as such [organisms], where rather than keeping ourselves completely available to them, we observe them or keep part of ourselves outside the relationship"¹¹. One of the employees named Lori Zarza claims that "[w]hen he [McCandless] talked, he was always going on about trees and nature and weird stuff like that. We all thought he was missing a few screws" (Krakauer 34). Another guy whom McCandless finds in a trailer named Charlie has another impression of McCandless. He thinks that McCandless is awkwardly unsociable due to his abnormal mental states and behaviour, and that he always prefers to be alone (35). This is what Buber considers as an 'I-It' relation because these people stand to observe and experience McCandless as an object. This lack of dialogical communication, and the absence of the whole being and sharing are an expression of an 'I-It' relation. In lieu of approaching McCandless, or trying to converse with him and know about his story as an individual, these people are just observing and making judgements of him.

In addition to his previous description of 'I-It' realm of relating, Satinder P. Gill also includes an explication of the status of 'I-Thou' relationships and how to engage in them. As he points out:

[I]t is possible to place ourselves completely into a relationship, to truly understand and 'be there' with another person, without masks, pretenses, even without words. Such a moment of *relating* is called 'I-Thou.' Each person comes to such a *relationship* without preconditions. Such a bond enlarges each person, and each person responds by trying to enhance the other person. The result is true dialogue and true sharing. (Author's emphasis 24)

This explains McCandless' decision to quit his job and leave Bullhead City. He directly returns to Jan burres and Bob. When he arrives at their camping place, McCandless starts complaining about his days in Bullhead, and that "he'd grown tired of Bullhead, tired of punching a clock, tired of the 'plastic people' he worked with, and decided to get the hell out of town" (Krakauer 36). McCandless does not bear their spuriousness, nor their constant behaviour of making judgement of him.

McCandless' return to Burres indicates his attachment to her. When the people in Bullhead proved to be inauthentic, he finds that the right people to be with are Burres and her folks. Unlike what people in Bullhead say about McCandless, Burres confirms that "[h]e had a *good* time when he was around people, a *real* good time. At the swap meet he'd talk and talk and talk to everybody who come by. He must have met six or seven dozen people in Niland, and he was friendly with every one of them" (Author's emphasis 37). This relationship is built upon trust and authenticity without judgement, objectification, or qualification. 'I-Thou' relation is how the 'I' is in both heart and mind with the 'Thou'.

It is endorsed that "when we meet someone as a You rather than as an It, we each encounter the other with mutual openness. We do not merely see one another, we meet one another, and so we are exposed to one another" (Martin 201). In his days in Carthage, McCandless meets Westerberg's girlfriend Gail Borah, "[t]hirty-five years old, divorced, a mother of two teenage children, she quickly became close to McCandless" (Krakauer 50). The openness is clearly exhibited between McCandless and Borah. This is clearly seen in the novel where she mentions that "'Alex [McCandless] talked a lot when we got together,' Borah recalls. 'Serious stuff, like he was baring his soul, kind of. He said he could tell me things that he couldn't tell the others'" (50). That is to say, Borah is present with her whole being. She is there to listen to him with no judgments. They both meet each other with

reciprocity and openness. McCandless exposes himself to her. Hence, they see each other as 'Thous' ('Yous'), but never as 'Its'.

In order to explore further an explication of 'I-Thou' relationship and mutuality, Kenneth Kramer and Mechthild Gawlick incorporate an experience of a university student named Jennifer Maione. The writers wanted to reflect on her story of a real 'I-Thou' relationship. The student vouches:

I recall a conversation that I believe was confirming for me as well as the person I was talking to. My freshman year in high school, a girl on my bus was left off near her house and as she crossed the street a car came over the hill and hit her. I didn't see it, but she was taken away in an ambulance and wasn't in school for a few days. We weren't very close ... but I got her phone number from another neighbour and gave her a call. ... We ended up talking for hours. What I remember most about our discussion is that she made me feel as though I had genuinely listened and offered her something no one else had. I think that I was the one person she really opened up to ... I know we talked for a long time and I know that I got off the phone feeling very good, unaware of how much time had passed, and wishing that the conversation didn't have to end. (20)

Eventually, the writers sought to hint towards an inference that in accordance with "Buberian terms, each participant experience mutual presence, a vital reciprocity, an elemental togetherness not restricted by time awareness" (20).

Prior to the day of his departure, McCandless is told that he is invited to dine with Mary Westerberg, Wayne Westerberg's mother. Wayne has this tendency of bringing his employees to dine with him and his mother but she is never fond of any of them. However,

after insisting on meeting McCandless, Mrs Westerberg finally agreed to meet the kid. Surprisingly, both of them seem to like each other so much that they kept conversing all night long (Krakauer 53). The student in the first example did not know the girl at first, but when she tried to call her, she made a genuine and successful conversation. They talked for hours with whole togetherness. Likewise, McCandless and Westerberg's mother exhibit their 'I-Thou' engagement, and conversed successfully with mutual presence, and with their whole beings participating. Westerberg's mother says: "[t]here was something fascinating about him ... he was fun to visit with; I didn't want the night to end. I was looking forward to seeing him again this fall. I can't get him out of my mind" (53).

All moments of growing and becoming require a 'Thou'. They unfold between people rather than within them, for "one becomes *human* only in *I-Thou* relationships, for only these call a person into unique wholeness" (Kramer and Gawlick 16, authors' emphasis). An 'I-Thou' relationship is the path ahead for an authentic living. These very moments occur in the unforeseeable inconstancy of genuine, fully engaged relationships. In 'I-Thou' relations People meet each other with grace and honesty, mutual activities, and manners of reciprocation.

It is held that 'I-Thou' is not a relation of which one conceive oneself particularly bound to pay. Rather, it is vivified through spontaneous grace and unprompted uprightness with others. It rises from one's unconditional presence for the other, and resides in the presence of one's whole being with the other. Nonetheless, one can choose to enter into an 'I-Thou' relation deliberately. In other words, one can allow oneself to display a delicate appreciation of other's feelings, and to cultivate the brawler to engage in potential 'I-Thou' moments whenever it is possible.

Buber believes that the allegedly found soul mate is not just a specific person whom one acquires exceptional feelings toward. In fact, the concept is all relational. 'I-Thou' relationships are the key to real living. As Buber argues:

If I face a human being as my *Thou*, and say the primary word *I-Thou* to him, he is not a thing among things, and does not consist of things. This human being is not *he or she*, bounded from every other *he or she*, a specific point in space and time within the net of the world; nor is he a nature able to be experienced and described, a loose bundle of named qualities. But with neighbour, and whole in himself, he is *Thou* and fills the heavens. This does not mean that nothing exists except himself. But all else lives in *his* light.
(Author's emphasis 8)

Wherever he goes, McCandless' self continuously abuts another stranger's. Every time he meets a person, McCandless makes a stirring and unforgettable impression on them. In every relation, he experiences the exhibition of mutual understanding and reciprocal love. Krakauer, however, writes that no one "was affected more powerfully by his or her brief contact with the boy [McCandless] than Ronald Franz, who was eighty years old when their paths intersected in January 1992" (40). The affection between McCandless and Franz was deep and authentic. Both of them have no families. By being Alexander Super-tramp, McCandless is another person with a new identity. Franz also lost his family due to a car accident, and he lived in an indescribable solitude ever since: "[w]hen Franz met McCandless, his long-dormant paternal impulses were kindled anew" (41).

McCandless moves again, but he never forgets about his relations. One day he decides to make a phone call and talk to Franz. Franz declares that "[w]hen [he] heard his voice, it was like sunshine after a month of rain" (43). McCandless returns to meet Franz

for another time. Happy being with the company of each other, Franz and McCandless converse all the time about everything: "[s]ometimes we'd drive for hours without saying a word," he [Franz] recalls. 'Even when he was sleeping, I was happy just knowing he was there'" (44). These lines, thus, are serviceable as evidences that Franz faces McCandless as his 'Thou', and that all else lives in his light.

Detachment and categorization are inevitable in modern societies. A fact confirming the ever existing 'I-It' relations. 'I-It' relationships exist in public health policies or health and community services. In such environments, one can observe how people relate to each other. By categorizing people, one is experiencing them as objects rather than human beings. For instance, 'I-It' relation resides in viewing a person as an alcoholic, divorced, HIV infected individual, prostitute, etc. This categorization prevents the existence of an 'I-Thou' relationship, for it leads to a partial, not fully engaged relationship. It distances people from knowing the individual as a person. It distances them from seeing a person's true being. That is to say, the 'I-It' relationship is the very result of detachment and categorization. As it is illustrated by Scudder:

[I]n I-It relationships persons do not relate to each other with their whole being but categorically-that is, say, teaching a retarded student rather than Susie Smith. These relationships are obviously one-sided rather than mutual. ... In I-Thou relationships, the partners relate to each other as whole persons. Rather than subsuming the other under a category, the partners deal with each other as they appear to each other. In addition, they accept the legitimacy of the other's being.¹²

'I-It' relationships could be understood not only in terms of categorizing patients or behaviours, it can also be understood in terms of racial discrimination. This categorization

is rather deep and very dehumanizing. The 1990's in America was a decade of uproar and rowdiness, and that was due to racial discrimination towards African Americans. The U.S.A. witnessed the period of the most fatal race riots in its history. This tumultuous relationship between blacks and whites is an expression of 'I-It' relationships. Rather than utter human beings, African Americans are viewed as a totally separate category. This is made clear in the novel as a good example between McCandless and a female friend named Kris Maxie who was an African American in his team at school. As she professes:

'We'd hang out during snack break at his locker and talk about life, the state of the world, serious things. I'm black, and I could never figure out why everyone made such a big deal about race. Chris would talk to me about that kind of thing. He understood. He was always questioning stuff in the same way. I liked him a lot. He was a really good guy.' (Krakauer 83)

McCandless is then alienated from the society because of objectification as well as categorization. The way he addresses his black mate proves the presence of his whole being. It shows his understanding, attentiveness, and the valuation of her individuality as a human being, but not as a black person. He accepts her as she appears to him without categorization. This is what Buber calls 'I-Thou' relationship.

The intense and genuine relationships of McCandless with all the characters he meets prove his ability to meet, encounter, and experience 'I-Thou' relations. The attachment McCandless feels towards these people is that they share his own ideals. Unlike his parents, they do not live in accordance with mainstream American culture. In the case of Wayne Westerberg, Krakauer describes the people who live in Carthage as humble and hard-working farmers whose biggest worry is the volatility of the weather and finding a way to

cut turnsoles in their meadows (18). Despite his life as a hitchhiker, McCandless sees Carthage as his home, and its people as his family.

When it comes to Jan Burres and her boyfriend Bob, it can be said that their status mirrors that of McCandless'. That is to say, Jan and Bob were always rubber tramps voyaging the U.S regions. Likewise, McCandless is a leather tramp who lives a nomadic existence. In addition, Jan and Bob stay at a place called the slabs which "functions as the seasonal capital of a teeming itinerant society—a tolerant, rubber-tired culture comprising the retired, the exiled, the destitute, the perpetually unemployed" (36). Like McCandless, Jan and Bob do not fit the modern society, and they do not live with modern conveniences. The other character whom McCandless makes great affection on is Ronald Franz. Franz is an old man who lives all alone in his department. When he was serving his term in the military, he received a call that his wife and son were dead due to a car accident. Ever since, Franz lived desperately in a constant solitude. If there is something common between them, it is certainly the absence of family. McCandless' parents represent everything he scorns and loathes: materialism, conformism, and also commercialism. Unlike his parents, these people live outside the societal norms and values. However, McCandless' attachment to these people is even deeper. He finds sincerity and genuineness in their company. He finds authenticity not within him and them, but between him and them. Authenticity is relational; real living is relationships, and engaging in 'I-Thou' relationships is being authentic.

According to Suzanne Marrow,

The existentialist and the Catholic share certain important concerns and values: the acceptance of despair and an awareness of human morality as a means of heightening one's moral sense, the emphasis on the developing individual, the ideal of responsibility for one's actions, the importance of

freedom and choice, and the assertion that individuals must establish a proper relation to their community, thereby overcoming alienation and psychic fragmentation.¹³

Accordingly, McCandless would be viewed as a free individual who chooses to live by his own epitomes, a person who stands responsible without blaming others for all his actions, and an authentic human being who proves his capacity of establishing pure and genuine relationships with others. Thus, McCandless could overcome his status of being alienated by entering into 'I-Thou' relationships.

When it comes to the primary word 'I-It' of describing relationships, "Buber is primarily concerned about the increasing tendency in the modern world to treat other persons as objects to be used, manipulated, and exploited. ... [Buber, thus, argues that] I-It relation refers mainly to the inevitable use of objects and persons for private, selfish purposes" (Charmé 162). This is perfectly illustrated in the novel when McCandless meets a farmer called Crazy Ernie. After hitchhiking around the west, McCandless spends a whole week tramping by foot. When Ernie shows up, McCandless accepts his ride and hops in his lorry. On the road, Ernie offers McCandless a job to work in his farm. After their arrival, McCandless decides to start working immediately.

Krakauer affirms that "the meaning he [McCandless] wrested from existence lay beyond the comfortable path: McCandless distrusted the value of things that came easily" (131). Thus, McCandless always takes arduous and dirty jobs. He never complains about his condition as long as he is the one who chooses it to be one way or another. McCandless begins his work and tries to be as authentic to it as any other job he held before. However, "[a]fter working there eleven days with six other vagabonds, it became clear to McCandless that Ernie had no intention of ever paying him, so he stole a red ten-speed bicycle from the

clutter in the yard, pedalled into Chico, and ditched the bike in a mall parking lot" (27). It is clear that Ernie has nothing but manipulation towards McCandless. He takes advantage of his young age, and exploits him to work with no wage at all. He meets McCandless for his own selfish purposes. Therefore, he does not see him as his 'Thou', but rather as an 'It'.

Authentic existence comes from righteous relationships with others. Here righteous means to the extent of saying 'Thou' to the other. McCandless' encounters are into the realm of the primary word 'I-Thou', for they were not a means to some objectives or selfish purposes. Rather, these relations were of full presence, and involving the whole being of each subject.

In spite of the very fact that McCandless finds that these people are not affiliated with American mainstream values, he decides to leave and complete his odyssey to Alaska. He is alienated from the emptiness he finds around his family, from the banalities of conformism and materialism of his society, and from the objectification and categorization in his school. Eventually, he realises that the people he encounters represent everything he stands for and believes in. Nonetheless, he decides to eschew human intimacy and flees the expectations of Westerberg, Jan and Bob, and eventually the old man Franz. This time, McCandless cannot be considered as an alienated protagonist because of the very fact that he is capable of building authentic relationships with others. If ever he was alienated, it is because he found everything he stood against. By leaving these people, it would be considered as an assertion of his free choice to live alone in the bush.

McCandless is a character who takes existentialism to the extreme. He thinks that even human relationships can limit his freedom and makes him in a way fall under the shells of conformity. In a postcard sent to Franz, he claims: "[y]ou are wrong if you think joy

emanates only or principally from human relationships. God has placed it all around us. It is in everything and anything we might experience" (Author's emphasis 46).

McCandless continues his adventure on the grounds that experience is the ultimate reality. He is towards the path of disengagement with the authentic existence that resides in encounter with others. This is seen when after traveling for a while, McCandless declares that "[i]t is the experiences, the memories, the great triumphant joy of living to the fullest extent in which real meaning is found" (Krakauer 32).

In the realm of the 'I-It', Human beings only experience. They do not initiate relationships. As Buber states:

The man who experiences has no part in the world. For it is 'in him' and not between him and the world that the experience arises. The world has no part in the experience. It permits itself to be experienced, but has no concern in the matter. For it does nothing to the experience, and the experience does nothing to it. As experience, the world belongs to the primary word *I-It*. The primary word *I-Thou* establishes the world of relation. (Author's emphasis 5-6)

It seems that after leaving all the people he knows behind, and heading to live all alone in Alaska, McCandless is now in the realm of 'I-It' because he is only experiencing the world without establishing relationships with the people existing in it.

It is true that McCandless is now far away from his friends, but he does not forget about them. Their stories become part of his life as much as his story becomes part of theirs. He still thinks of them and sends them postcards whenever he finds the opportunity. He holds them in his heart and mind even if they are not there with him. This holding is 'I-Thou' relating. If McCandless would be considered as a person experiencing 'I-It' relating, it is not

because he deceives and manipulates people, it is rather because he is experiencing the world without betweenness or relation to others at all.

At his arrival in the Alaska interior, McCandless feels that he has to inform his friends about his coming. Franz had the opportunity to meet McCandless and have brunch with him. After discussing his need to experience the wilderness at length, McCandless hints that this is an arrangement for a farewell and then goes on his way. When it comes to Westerberg, Jan Burres and Bob, he was far away to meet them. McCandless decides to write them succinct cards. To Westerberg he states: "[t]his is the last you shall here from me Wayne. ... If this adventure proves fatal and you don't hear from me again, I want you to know you're a great man. I now walk into the wild" (Krakauer 54, author's emphasis). In the same way he writes to Jan and Bob: "This is the last you shall receive from me. I now walk out to live amongst the wild. Take care, it was great knowing you" (Author's emphasis 54).

In accordance with the existential terms of Buber in describing the status of life with others, Kramer and Gawlick wrote:

As the *Thou* fades away from relationships, *Thou* becomes an *It*-for-itself until becoming an *It* to an 'I' as an object of experience. The subjective 'I' cannot remain independent but becomes a subject by virtue of an *It* to define itself against. In other words, the 'I' is defined by its relational, or lack thereof, orientation to the world. (Authors' emphasis 30-31)

The quotation above emphasizes the fact that there is no independent 'I'. There is either the 'I' of the primary word 'I-It', or 'I' of the primary word 'I-Thou'. Man either experiences the world with its objects and objectifies human beings as things to be used and manipulated, or makes authentic relations to really view a person as a *Thou*. Hereby, the vivid reality about human beings according to Buber is that one cannot grow as a human being all on one's own,

it is the 'Thou' that completes the 'I'. That is to say, without genuine relationships, man is only experiencing the world.

McCandless has no second thought about exploring the wilderness. Eventually, he attains his desire of quitting civilization, and peruses a nomadic lifestyle. He has no phone, not even a watch. He literally leaves all patterns of civilization. His previous relationships prove his genuine vision of human beings. Still, McCandless is in the realm of 'I-It'. For when he is in Alaska, he is just experiencing the world with no relating: "[i]f *I-It* indicates degrees of separation from others, *I-Thou* indicates a togetherness of close bonding" (Authors' emphasis 16). Being in Alaska means being very far from others. On the one hand, "McCandless was cut off from the rest of the world. He spent nearly four months in the bush all told, and during that period he didn't encounter another living soul" (Krakauer 118). On the other hand, "he hadn't spoken to his family in nearly two years" (11). These facts demonstrate his separatism from people; hence, his engagement into 'I-It' relating of only experiencing the world.

One of the most controversial conceptions in Buberian existentialism is that man can engage into impersonal relations. It is true that the primary word 'I-Thou' refers to relationships with human beings. Nonetheless, Buber suggested that through grace man can communicate with a tree or a cat. The latter means that even with the things that man experiences as well as objectifies can be related to as 'Thous' rather than 'Its'. This relationship is not necessarily based on linguistic forms, but rather on the genuine presence and the graceful act of relating. Yet, Buber believes that some form of communication can be held towards an object as a 'Thou'. As he suggests, "[t]he spheres of which the world of relation is built are three. First, our life with nature, in which the relation clings to the threshold of speech. Second, our life with men, in which the relation takes on the form of speech. Third, our life with intelligible forms, where the relation, being without speech, yet

begets it" (101). Here, man can relate to nature, human beings, and God. This act of relating may exist through both 'I-It' as well as 'I-Thou' realms of relationship.

Whilst being into the wild, McCandless is exploring the beauty of nature. However, McCandless' aim is not to travel for the sake of meditating nature. Rather, it is for the very reason that he cannot stand his society and prefers to live in arrant solitude. McCandless is a character who takes the works of fiction seriously. He is a person who appreciates art and classics bewitch his personality. McCandless has always been fascinated by passionate writers such as John Muir, Leo Tolstoy, and David Henry Thoreau. These writers were smitten by the natural world. In this principle, one might conclude that his goal is to contemplate the pastel silhouette of the wilderness, and engage into an 'I-Thou' relation with nature. But McCandless has different objectives. As Krakauer puts it, "[u]nlike Muir and Thoreau, McCandless went into the wilderness not primarily to ponder nature or the world at large but, rather, to explore the inner country of his soul" (130). McCandless' decision of vacating his previous life rises from his abhorrence towards society. Inasmuch as this metaphysical sketch can truly exist, it is rather problematic because in a modern society human beings treat each other as objects, let alone objects themselves. Therefore, McCandless is still in 'I-It' realm of relating as he is only experiencing the world with no 'I-Thou' relating, neither towards human beings nor nature.

After staying in Alaska all alone for about two months, McCandless decides to return to civilization, keep traveling and experiencing the world over. It is clear that McCandless' intention is to get out of the bush, and go through new experiences. However, when he reaches the Teklanika River which he crossed at his arrival, it was impossible to be passed due to the flood caused by constant rainfall. McCandless' great fear of the water makes him return back to the bus where he is staying (120-22). After another three months, McCandless

is out of rice, and there is no animals to hunt. He also cannot pass the river. He eventually starts to read about edible plants so as to nourish his body.

Krakauer sought to incorporate a thorough illustration of another Alaskan experience of a brilliant student named Gene Rosellini who, like McCandless, flees civilization and heads to start a new existence into the wild. Lastly, Rosellini comes to a deduction when he mentions in a letter to a friend:

/ began my adult life with the hypothesis that it would be possible to become a Stone Age native. For over 30 years, I programmed and conditioned myself to this end. In the last 10 of it, I would say I realistically experienced the physical, mental, and emotional reality of the Stone Age. But to borrow a Buddhist phrase, eventually came a setting face-to-face with pure reality. I learned that it is not possible for human beings as we know them to live off the land. (Author's emphasis 58)

In the modern world, 'I-It' relationships will always exist. The objectification and categorization of human beings can never be demolished. Human beings are not angels. Man cannot establish genuine relations with every living soul he encounters. Therefore, according to Buber, "[t]he primary word *I-It* is not of evil" (Author's emphasis 46). Buber also wrote that "without *It* man cannot live. But he who lives with *It* alone is not a man" (Author's emphasis 34).

While reading Boris Pasternak's *Doctor Zhivago*, McCandless comes to the lines that say: "[a]nd so it turned out that only a life similar to the life of those around us, merging with it without a ripple, is genuine life, and that an unshared happiness is not happiness.... And that was most vexing of all" (Krakauer 134). In his status of utter loneliness, McCandless comes to the realization of a veritable and inevitable illusion that true life is

being with others. As he writes down the margin of the page: "HAPPINESS ONLY REAL WHEN SHARED" (Author's emphasis 134). McCandless then faces his demise, and leaves the living world with the inclination towards the endorsement of Buber's conception that real living is meeting, sharing, encounter, and 'I-Thou' relationships towards others.

McCandless, thus, is a character who experiences Buber's two primary realms of relationships, 'I-Thou' as well as 'I-It'. His encounters with the characters of Westerberg, Jan Burres, and Ronald Franz, on the one hand, prove his assent of their lifestyle. On the other hand, these encounters vindicate his alienation from his family, school, and the meaninglessness he finds in the American society. In regards to their mutuality, whole presence, attentiveness, and reciprocity, McCandless and the people he encounters are an illustration of engaging into 'I-Thou' relations.

By quitting civilization, and living all alone in the wilderness, McCandless exhibits his 'I-It' relating by experiencing the world outside the terms of personal relationships. However, these genuine relations with others demonstrate the very fact that McCandless is an authentic existential character. He can also be considered to be authentic even in the realm of 'I-It' relating, at least in the sense that he does not engage in 'I-It' relationships with human beings, but rather on the grounds that he is only experiencing the world with no relationships at all. Nonetheless, eventually, McCandless resigns himself to the fact that a genuine life is that which is lived with others, and that a happy life is that which is based on sharing and engaging in authentic, personal relationships.

This illustration of McCandless' successful relations is actually a criticism of the American lifestyle as well as personal relationships. Krakauer puts it very clear that McCandless finds these people direct, honest, and represent what he stands for. By so doing, Krakauer is criticising the people whom McCandless is alienated from, namely his family,

his school, and the other inauthentic characters. Krakauer hints to the fact that the life of conformism, materialism, and commercialism is not a real life. This generates the fact that if his family and the American society as a whole were like the people he meets, McCandless would never leave.

Despite this criticism, the finality of the novel affirms the author's message that rather than submitting the self to live under the shells of solitude, one must be free and authentic through genuine relationships with others. Hence, the author is calling for a change, to live authentically, to treat human beings as 'Thous' rather than 'Its' for a perfect community and authentic relationships. Through the character of McCandless, Krakauer affirms the ideal that man can never quit society and civilization. Instead, man has to live in relation to the people around him, and try to engage into 'I-Thou' relations in order to live a true life and mould an authentic existence.

Endnotes and References:

¹ Jean-Paul Sartre, "Existentialism is a Humanism," trans. Walter Kaufman, *Existentialism From Dostoevsky to Sartre*, ed. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Penguin, 1975): 369.

² Martin Buber, *I and Thou*, trans. Ronald Gregor Smith (Edinburgh: T. & T. CLARK, 1958): 3.

³ W. Taylor Stevenson, "I-thou and I-it: An Attempted Clarification of Their Relationship," *The Journal of Religion* 43.3 (1963): 193.

⁴ Kenneth Kramer and Mechthild Gawlick, *Martin Buber's I and Thou: Practicing Living Dialogue* New York: Paulist Press, 2003): 29.

⁵ Clancy Martin, "Religious Existentialism," *A Companion to Phenomenology and Existentialism*, ed. Hubert L. Dreyfus and Mark A. Wrathall (West Sussex: Blackwell Publishing, 2009): 201.

⁶ Garifallia Doriza, "THE RISE OF THE I-IT WORLD IN FLANNERY O'CONNOR'S MONOLOGIC COMMUNITY," *Literature and Theology* 19.4 (2005): 312.

⁷ Jon Krakauer, *Into the Wild* (New York: Random House, 1996): 22.

⁸ "Understanding Dialogue: A Beginning," *Counterpoints* 289 (2005): 14.

⁹ Richard Schmitt, *Alienation and Freedom* (Colorado: Westview press, 2003): 3.

¹⁰ Stuart Charmé, "The Two I-thou Relations in Martin Buber's Philosophy," *The Harvard Theological Review* 70.1/2 (1977): 162.

¹¹ Satinder P. Gill, *Tacit Engagement: Beyond Interaction* (London: Springer International Publishing, 2015): 24.

¹² John R. Scudder, Jr, "Buber, Martin (1878-1965)," *Philosophy of Education: An Encyclopedia*, ed. J. J. Chambliss (New York: Routledge, 1996): 57.

¹³ Suzanne Morrow Paulson, *Flannery O'Connor: A Study of the Short Fiction* (Boston: Twayne, 1998): 13, qtd. in Garifallia Doriza, "THE RISE OF THE I-IT WORLD IN FLANNERY O'CONNOR'S MONOLOGIC COMMUNITY," *Literature and Theology* 19.4 (2005): 312.

Conclusion:

This very work study has been written to come to grips with the portrayal of the existential philosophical conceptions through Jon Krakauer's *Into the Wild*. The philosophy of existentialism has been used to present a clear idea of twentieth century American lifestyle where absolutes were subjective and what mattered was the experience itself. People sought to procure their dreams and live their beliefs disregarding their societal and cultural codes, religious norms, or any other systems that tried to limit their freedom to act.

The future and its interminable possibilities in a meaningless world condemn humankind to freedom, and Krakauer's protagonist does not elude the crushing accountability for his actions; rather, he confronts his status of being alienated, longs for his freedom of choice, and acts to preserve his authentic character. This research has shown that the protagonist Chris McCandless views the world differently, and consequently becomes aware of the nothingness and meaninglessness of his entourage. McCandless is thus alienated as well as non-affiliated with the American stream of life. It has been proved that McCandless finds himself under the circumstance of being condemned to freedom, and also use it to create an essence for his inane and hollow existence (make a better structure for this sentence). Krakauer portrays his protagonist to be the character that clearly fathoms possibilities, and thus takes every opportunity to mould an utterly authentic existence. McCandless is, eventually, an utter existential character and the most pristine of all characters in the novel, for he exhibits the three Sartrean concepts of alienation, freedom, and authenticity. Through his protagonist, Krakauer shows his criticism of the emptiness of the Americans' mere existence which is defined by material affluences, conformism to the

terms of their culture, and a meaningless society that is conditioned to materialism as well as commercialism.

Besides his individualistic display of McCandless as a free and authentic human being, Krakauer incorporates the relational patterns of authentic existence. McCandless has entered into 'I-Thou' relationships with other characters such as Wayne Westerberg, Mary Westerberg, Gail Borah, Ron Franz, Jan Burres and her boyfriend Bob. The latter makes him live in the realm of authenticity where meeting, dialogue, and whole presence of being reside. Nevertheless, McCandless falls under the shells of 'I-It' relating due to his predilection for solitude. He shows his status of only experiencing the world with no relation to human beings. However, Krakauer puts it clear in the end of the novel when McCandless realises that true life is actually the authentic engagement into human relationships. He accepts that leaving society was a totally misguided action. Once again, Krakauer criticises the fettle of modern American relational life. His protagonist's journey commenced in reaction to the banality of American society which represents what he mostly loathes. In this portrayal, Krakauer criticises a world of objectification when it comes to human relations, a world based on categorization when it comes to African Americans, and a world where there is no intimacy as well as trust between family members.

Existentialism is perfectly embodied through the novel's plot which is wholly about being alienated and wallowing into the meaninglessness of one's own world. It stresses the evasion of such alienation and longing forth to use one's arrant freedom in order to escape all patterns of inauthenticity. It also fosters unconditional engagement into authentic relationships that are based on the correct treatment of humankind, trust, equality, and dialogical communication, and truly be there and listen to the other. Therefore, existentialism is displayed through the novel's protagonist as well as its plot. *Into the Wild* is, thus, a piece of literature that joins a great deal of existential thought.

This fundamental drive and this attraction to living one's own beliefs is plainly conspicuous in the character of Chris McCandless. McCandless is perfectly the living embodiment of Sartrean as well as buberian versions of existentialism. Apropos to Sartre's concepts, McCandless is firstly alienated in a world that stands on ideals he does not approve to live by. He then starts to move towards dealienation by courageously confronting this status and using his freedom to act in accordance with his standards. Eventually, he overcomes the modality of self-deception, gives his existence the meaning he chooses, and stands as a total authentic being. When it comes to the existential concepts of Buber, McCandless falls under the shells of both 'I-It' as well as 'I-Thou' realms of relationships. He is always in the position of the 'I'. Rather than relating to others as 'Its', he is in fact the one treated as an 'It'. He is also in the realm of the 'I-It' due to his very experience of the world of things with no act of relating to human beings. In regard of his genuine relationships with the other characters of the novel, McCandless is conspicuously in the 'I-Thou' realm of relating. That is to say, *Into the Wild's* protagonist Chris McCandless is an utter existential hero.

Krakauer's practice of judgement appears in his protagonist's whole journey and his encounters with the other characters. His criticism is apparent in the protagonist's discomfort and estrangement from society, school, and family. Through the character of McCandless, Krakauer hints towards his dissatisfaction with a world of material excess and abstraction. He has also hinted towards his discontent with the status of a society that is blindly conditioned to conformism and commercialism. Despite the fact that Krakauer emphasises the significance and essentiality of genuine relationships between human beings for a better community, he also stresses on the hollowness in his society's relationships. This emphasis directly hints towards the incorporation of Krakauer's criticism. Nevertheless, Krakauer seems to validate the view that a true and happy life is meeting and sharing. On these

grounds, *Into the Wild* should be considered as a direct criticism of postmodern American lifestyle as well as its human relationships.

After a thorough scrutiny of Krakauer's work, it has been clarified that the latter is not a transcendentalist novel which sanctifies the inherent goodness of people as well as nature as it seems. Both its protagonist and plot abound the fact that *Into the Wild* is an arrant existential piece of literature. Seen in this light, it is also incumbent to realise that *Into the Wild's* protagonist Christopher McCandless, despite transcendentalist views, should now be regarded as an utter existential hero. In fact, it must be asserted that *Into the Wild* is undoubtedly an engrossing literary work that cannot eventually be encapsulated with existential views. It needs more researches and studies to figure out a stable scope for its ambiguous protagonist as well as plot. This humble dissertation is only a starting point of a lengthy studies and interpretations of the novel. This dissertation does also introduce an awareness of existentialism as a literary movement. It also stresses a requirement for a comprehensive scrutinization about existentialism in American literature.

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