Moving beyond wilderness?

An ecocritical analysis and discussion of how Jon Krakauer challenges the wilderness trope in *Eiger Dreams*, *Into the Wild*, and *Into Thin Air*.

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Abstract

This master's thesis is based on my personal interest in the wilderness trope, especially the grip it has on the American imagination. The American author Jon Krakauer is essential to investigate this field of interest, as he has a deep interest in nature and wilderness. Especially in his three books, *Eiger Dreams*, *Into the Wild*, and *Into Thin Air*, he portrays a wilderness trope that challenges traditional values. Therefore, the goal is to showcase how Krakauer systematically examines, challenges, and pushes beyond the wilderness trope as it is traditionally known in the US in the three books.

In order to conduct this ecocritical analysis and discussion of the three books, theoretical frameworks regarding the wilderness trope and contemporary narrative theories are accounted for to demonstrate how Krakauer conveys the wilderness trope. I primarily use Garrard's theory to account for the wilderness trope in general and use Muir and Adam to showcase traditional wilderness values. To demonstrate how Krakauer challenges these traditional values, I include Cronon, who problematizes these romanticized wildernesses, and DeLancey's new ecological concept of wilderness to showcase that traditional notions are no longer applicable today.

The results illustrate that Krakauer pushes beyond the traditional wilderness trope in general, but he does it differently in each book. *Eiger Dreams* is a collection of pieces in which Krakauer systematically investigates different interpretations of the wilderness trope. Here, he shows a deep respect for protecting wildernesses but also acknowledges that commercialization and fatal consequences are inevitable. *Into the Wild* is a non-fiction biography of McCandless, who searches for a more traditional and pristine way of living in the Alaskan wilderness. However, Krakauer critiques McCandless' choices as he misunderstands wilderness, arguing that the trope becomes one without reflection and reality as he cannot differentiate between myth and reality. *Into Thin Air* chronicles the disaster on Mount Everest in 1996, in which Krakauer presents a complex wilderness trope. He associates the wilderness trope with natural beauty and awe but overall describes it as dehumanizing and turning people into lesser human beings. Krakauer critiques the stakes and conditions on the mountain, as he sees them as a perversion of traditional wilderness values.

The ecocritical analysis and discussion of *Eiger Dreams*, *Into the Wild*, and *Into Thin Air* demonstrates that Krakauer depicts the wilderness trope differently in each book. To conclude, Krakauer portrays a complex wilderness trope in all three books that challenge traditional wilderness values: one that moves beyond wilderness as it is traditionally known in the US.

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1. Introduction

Throughout history, people have been around wilderness for thousands of years, which has caused a growing interest in exploring these natural lands. Today, people are still as interested in exploring natural land, as studies show that going into these natural lands has psychological benefits, improves mental and physical health, and even reduces risks of getting diseases (Baker). However, many of these wilderness areas are endangered due to the growing popularization of exploring natural lands as well as the growing population on Earth. Even though wilderness areas are being protected and preserved, not many places on Earth are classified as pure and pristine (Costa et al.). Recent research from 2016 reveals that only 23% of the world's land is wilderness, and there has been a 10% decline in wilderness areas in the last two decades, which is an alarming decline (Watson et al. 2929-2933).

In the same way that there has been a growing interest in protecting the environment in recent decades, literature that regards wilderness representation has also gained popularization. Here, the American author Jon Krakauer is essential, as he is an important figure in the literature field of wilderness and adventure (Merino 15). Especially his three books *Eiger Dreams*, *Into the Wild*, and *Into Thin Air*, are regarded as some of the most popular and influential wilderness books (Goodreads). The books each represent the wilderness trope differently; hence, this thesis will regard Krakauer's portrayal of the trope by exploring the themes: the relationship between wilderness and humans, the risks of interfering with wilderness, the aspect of environmental ethics, and differentiating between trope and myth. Conducting an ecocritical analysis and discussion of how Krakauer portrays the wilderness trope in all three books has never been done before, which makes this master's thesis a significant contribution, as it will discover the complexity of how Krakauer challenges the wilderness trope. This notion, the wilderness trope in general, along with a personal interest in Krakauer's works, has formed the basis for this master's thesis.

In order to analyze and compare these books, I will include an in-depth account of tropes, wilderness theories, and contemporary narrative theories. Here Garrard is essential as he outlines the origin of the wilderness trope and how it has changed. Muir and Adams are influential regarding the traditional wilderness trope; in contrast, Cronon rethinks traditional values, and DeLancey provides a new concept of the wilderness trope. Furthermore, I will use Bignold's creative non-fiction theory and Keen's empathy theory to create a deeper understanding of how Krakauer conveys the wilderness trope,

which overall enhances the reading experience. All things considered, this thesis's focal point is to analyze and discuss how the wilderness trope is portrayed in the three books by Krakauer, which will ultimately provide an answer to the thesis statement:

> In *Eiger Dreams*, *Into the Wild,* and *Into Thin Air*, Jon Krakauer systematically examines, challenges, and pushes beyond the wilderness trope as it is traditionally known in the US.

2. Approach

This approach section outlines the research methodology I will use to analyze and discuss the chosen literary works. I will explain why I chose the author and the specific books, describe the process of collecting the theoretical framework, and describe the process of conducting the ecocritical analysis and discussion.

When investigating what topic to choose for my master's thesis, I knew I wanted to focus on the wilderness trope as the basis for my theoretical framework. Here, the American author Krakauer is especially relevant regarding wilderness and adventure, which quickly made me want to work with him in this master's thesis. The reason for choosing Krakauer was also a more meaningful choice since he has roots and a deep interest in nature and wilderness, making him an influential writer in modern American literature. In the introduction of *Into The Wild*, he writes that when he investigated the story and McCandless, he reflected on more significant subjects while writing, for example, how wilderness has this large hold on the American imagination (Krakauer *Wild* x). Out of the eight books he has written, I have chosen three; *Eiger Dreams* (1992), *Into The Wild* (1996), and *Into Thin Air* (1997). I chose these as they all deal with the themes of climbing, nature, civilization versus the natural world, ambitions, ethical dilemmas, the power of nature, and fatal consequences. I was familiar with the two last-mentioned books, but I had never heard of *Eiger Dreams* before, which was suggested by my supervisor. After reading the book, I knew it was relevant in correlation with the wilderness trope, which led to the decision to analyze all three, not just Krakauer's two most famous books.

Another reason why I chose these three books is because they are all connected with *Outside Magazine*. The magazine plays a prominent role in the execution of all of the books because if Krakauer did not have his job as a correspondent in the magazine, he would never have written them. The articles

Krakauer wrote became springboards for his books, and thus *Outside Magazine* is the common denominator tying the three non-fiction books together. Krakauer states, "The pieces I've written for Outside Magazine are definitely my best work, and they're virtually all about the outdoors" (Merino 35). Krakauer had 11 out of the 12 pieces published in magazines, some in *Outside Magazine,* and those pieces he turned into the book *Eiger Dreams* (Krakauer *Eiger* xiii). Years later, the magazine asked Krakauer to write about McCandless' life and death right after his corpse was found (Krakauer *Wild* ix). This story turned into a 9000-word article, and it was published in the 1993 January issue of the magazine (Krakauer *Lost in the Wild - Death of an Innocent*). After the article was published, his fascination with the story of McCandless only got more significant. Due to a continuing interest in McCandless' life and how other more significant subjects were present, Krakauer wrote the book *Into the Wild*, published over three years after the article (Krakauer *Wild* ix-x). *Into Thin Air* was created when *Outside Magazine* sent Krakauer to Nepal to write a 17000-word article about climbing Mount Everest, published in the 1996 September issue of the magazine (Krakauer *The Story on Everest - Into Thin Air*). Similar to writing *Into the Wild* article, Krakauer felt as if the account of Mount Everest still affected him after the publication, leading to him writing the memoir *Into Thin Air*.

> The *Outside* piece was as accurate as I could make it under the circumstances, but my deadline had been unforgiving, the sequence of events had been frustratingly complex, and the memories of the survivors had been badly distorted by exhaustion, oxygen depletion, and shock (Krakauer *Air* XI).

Here, Krakauer explains that the original article was not broad enough and did not do justice to account for what happened on the mountain. Therefore, trying to make more sense of the experiences, Krakauer writes that it became extremely important for him to write about the experience "... in complete detail, unconstrained by a limited number of column inches. This book is the fruit of that compulsion" (Krakauer *Air* XII). Another notable notion about *Outside Magazine* is how it enabled Krakauer to climb Mount Everest, his dream since he was young. In 1996 it cost about $65,000 to climb Mount Everest (Krakauer *Air* 6), whereas today, it ranges from $32,000 to $200,000, depending on the expedition type (Dawson). The experience, article, and book only happened because he worked as a correspondent for the magazine, and they paid for his trip. Therefore, not only does *Outside Magazine* tie all the books together, but the

magazine is also the foundation of why Krakauer wrote the books; *Outside Magazine* is the main reason why the books exist.

Having chosen the three books by Krakauer, I read them all to gain an overview of their own individual way of portraying the wilderness trope. Knowing that the wilderness trope will be the central theme, I created an overview of the theoretical framework I intended to use for the analysis and discussion to create an outline for the master's thesis: wilderness theories and contemporary narrative theories. At the same time, I wrote the theoretical framework, I created the wilderness model, which will be introduced and explained later, to create an overview of the many wilderness theories. Not only does this model tie all the theoretical framework together, it also serves as a way of demonstrating where Krakauer is located in the model. When collecting works for the theoretical framework, I primarily used sources from *Aalborg University Bibliotek* or *Google Scholar*. All of these sources were selected carefully, ensuring they were ultimately peer-reviewed or written by authors who were either reviewers or scholars with knowledge of this particular field. I kept in mind that the sources I collected should apply to the three books by Krakauer. For example, in the theoretical frameworks regarding narrative empathy theory, I needed to include a second source by Morgan as a supplement to Keen's source. Even though Keen is at the forefront of narrative empathy theory, it is a critique point that she targets most of her theory towards fictional literature (Keen 134). Here, Morgan states that Keen's theory applies to both fiction and non-fiction (Morgan), which is an essential notion as Krakauer's three books are all non-fiction narratives.

After that, I conducted the literature review to showcase existing scholarly articles and pieces written about the three books in relation to the wilderness trope. They also help identify essential themes in the books related to the theoretical framework while illustrating why this field of study is relevant today. However, conducting the literature review turned out to be more difficult than anticipated because even though Krakauer has received many awards for his writing and journalism and many of his books are bestsellers, only a "... few literary scholars have written about his nonfiction" (Lombard 4). This notion is a critique point because it was a challenge to find reviews online, which is why most of them are of older date.

The ecocritical analysis and discussion were conducted through the method of close reading (BCC College). As stated above, before writing the theoretical framework and analysis, I read the books to gain an overview of the plot, the characters, and how Krakauer portrays the wilderness trope in each book.

Based on this, I decided which topics to analyze and discuss; the structure, the portrayal of the wilderness trope, the environmental aspect, and his writing style. Then I began rereading them with the purpose of noting the number of essential passages or quotes in the book. Then I went through all these pages and noted the quote in a separate document, and then categorized the quotes into the chosen topics. Additionally, I bought the books as ebooks to search for key terms, for example, wilderness, nature, commercialization, death, pristine, civilization, myth, ambition, et cetera, to ensure I did not overlook important parts and quotes in the books. Then I chose the prime quotes in my long list that would support my main arguments in the analysis, all in relation to the theoretical framework. Lastly, all the main points and key findings in the ecocritical analysis and discussion are summed up in the conclusion, which ties up the whole master's thesis.

3. Theoretical framework

Theoretical frameworks are essential to this research since they provide an overview of relevant and essential theories and concepts that are key when analyzing and discussing Krakauer's three books: *Eiger Dreams, Into the Wild,* and *Into Thin Air*. As these books all revolve around different portrayals of the wilderness trope, and since the wilderness trope is broad, all wilderness theories are connected in the wilderness model. This model connects traditional views of wilderness, newer views of wilderness theory, and a new ecological concept of wilderness. In order to fully understand the development and changes wilderness has experienced, the concept of tropes will be accounted for since tropes contribute to shaping and constructing perceptions of wildernesses. Additionally, contemporary narrative theories are accounted for as well, as these illustrate how Krakauer's narrative presents the wilderness trope in his books. Therefore, these theories are chosen to highlight how tropes and the narrative shape people's understanding of the wilderness trope in Krakauer's three books.

3.1. Tropes

Defining the umbrella term trope is essential since it covers many recurring key elements in literature studies and generally shapes how people understand the world. Therefore, including an account of the term helps highlight themes, patterns, and key points of a specific cultural trope. Since the term has many meanings and can vary among scholars, an account of the term is essential.

When looking for a comprehensive definition, it becomes evident how theorists differ in defining the broad term. Tekla Bude, a professor at Oregon State University, underlines how the term contains two definitions in a literary sense. She focuses on how a trope is a term for an ordinary and recurring theme and for figures of speech, such as a metaphor. She defines a trope as a device or genre within a literary sense, specifically within storytelling. The definition of a trope as a figure of speech dates back to Aristotle (Bude). The definition of a trope as a 'narrative convention' only dates back to 1975, when it appeared in the *Oxford English Dictionary* (Bude). She describes the term as an example of a 'semantic shift' since the word has changed meaning over time. This semantic shift was affected by the popularity of structuralism, the general theory of culture, and influential linguistics books. She believes a trope is beautiful because it "... reveals something about how we play with language - when we write, we're always balancing the new and the familiar, the literal and the figurative" (Bude). Bude states that a trope is an essential tool in our language because it helps us express ourselves. None of the above definitions holds greater validity over the other since it depends on one's individual viewpoint (Bude).

Garrard, an author and Professor of Environmental Humanities, deals with the relationship between literature and the environment in his book *Ecocriticism*, which is one of the first handbooks in the literary area of ecological criticism. He introduces the broad concept trope, which he finds extremely important since it shapes people's understanding of the natural world. Within his book, he presents and investigates six common environmental tropes: pollution, wilderness, apocalypse, dwelling, animals, and the earth. These tropes are modes of envisioning, constructing, or portraying nature in a figure. Garrard states that he "... will be reading culture as rhetoric [...] as the production, reproduction and transformation of large-scale metaphors" (Garrard 7). Within each trope, he will explore the genre, narrative, images, and metaphors and investigate the fact that each trope is not supposed to be limiting but enabling (Garrard 7). He also traces them to their origins and investigates how they have changed and function today. Garrard's conceptualization resembles Bude's, as both scholars believe that the term can develop and undergo transformation over time while still being linked to its broader social context (Garrard 8).

Garrard also discusses the role of rhetoric and culture in correlation with his conceptualization of tropes. He believes that tropes, which he associates with rhetoric, seemingly play an essential role in broader social struggles between different groups, being gender, class, and ethnic groups. Different cultures of the world are not all identical regarding how powerful they are, and some hold greater power in shaping culture (Garrard 8-9). He highlights a contrast between wilderness and an industrialized and

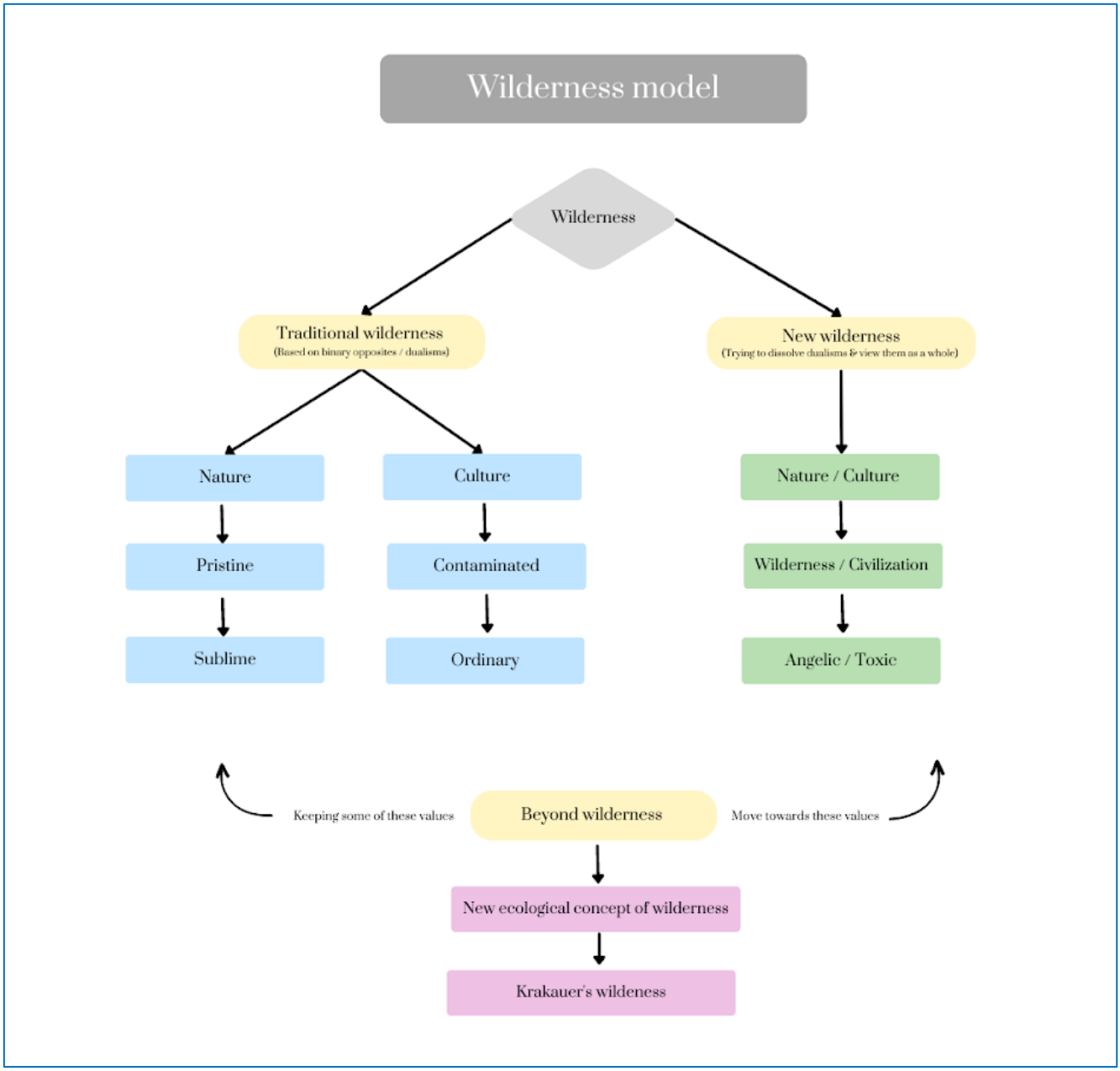
materialistic worldview, stating how people must "... remain aware that even tropes that might potentially confront or subvert environmentally damaging practices may be appropriated" (Garrard 9). Some companies have used the wilderness trope in their commercials when portraying their products; here, Garrard gives the example of a vehicle company that portrays the wilderness as the vehicle's natural home. This notion is an issue, or even a case of irony, according to Garrard, since the wilderness is traditionally associated with being pristine and untouched, however, these values do not apply to vehicles in any manner. However, the "... juxtaposition might suggest to us that 'wilderness' has an ideological function in this case, helping to legitimize the conspicuous consumption of a privileged class and nation" (Garrard 9). In this example, Garrard demonstrates how rich people of a 'privileged class and nation' make commercials of large vehicles, placing them in nature. Combining these two contrasts justifies this behavior by privileged people. Garrard associates this with constructionism, which he believes is a central tool for cultural analysis (Garrard 9). Constructionism, a learning theory that helps understand the surrounding world, combined with the idea of nature, becomes a powerful tool for understanding how a concept, for example, wilderness, is culturally constructed. "The challenge for ecocritics is to keep one eye on the ways in which 'nature' is always in some ways culturally constructed, and the other on the fact that nature really exists, both the object and, albeit distantly, the origin of our discourse" (Garrard 10). Consequently, this means that ecocritics find it essential to remember that culture creates nature and that nature is an actual physical piece of land as well. These two views must be considered when understanding the construction of nature (Garrard 10).

In summary, Bude defines a trope as a device or genre within a literary sense that is an essential literary tool in our language since it contributes to expressing ourselves. Garrard investigates the concept even further and focuses on how tropes shape people's understanding of the natural world, discussing how people must be aware of the new popularization of combining the wilderness trope with a materialistic worldview. Therefore, both Bude and Garrard acknowledge that the term can develop and undergo transformation over time while still being connected to its broader social context.

3.2. The wilderness trope

Throughout history, the concept of wilderness has been explored in numerous literary works that traditionally focus on it through the relationship between civilization and the natural world. However, humans have increasingly influenced this natural world throughout the years, and this traditional view of

the relationship has become nuanced. This change is unfolding in the following theoretical framework, but to understand it fully, I have developed a wilderness model. This model lists the various aspects of traditional wilderness and newer views of wilderness and presents an overview of how the two are intertwined. I developed this model after accounting for most of the theoretical framework of the wilderness trope since all of the information and aspects within the model derive from the theoretical frameworks. After creating the model, I revised the whole section of wilderness theory and drew parallels to the model to gain an overview of how to understand the theory entirely.



The model is to be understood as the following; the model divides the wilderness trope into two branches; traditional wilderness and new wilderness. The traditional wilderness covers all views based on binary opposites or dualisms, such as nature versus culture, pristine versus contaminated, and sublime versus ordinary. On the other hand, new wilderness tries to dissolve these dualisms and treat them as coexistent. For example, nature and culture should be viewed as a whole. At the bottom of the model is a section labeled 'beyond wilderness', which somewhat connects the two branches, as this one keeps some traditional values while moving towards new wilderness values. The new ecological concept of wilderness, which will be explored later, is placed together with Krakauer's wilderness representation at the bottom as they move beyond. Throughout the theoretical framework and the comparative analysis, I will refer to this model to create an overview of the many views on wilderness, which will create a more extensive understanding of the trope and how it has developed.

3.2.1. Traditional wilderness

In order to fully understand wilderness theory, Garrard's chapter about the wilderness trope is particularly relevant. Garrard presents the idea of traditional wilderness as a pristine place untouched by people but also as an establishment protecting wild areas (Garrard 59). Even though wilderness is a relatively newer notion, Garrard states that exploring the history behind the wilderness trope is essential to understand the concept's recent ideas. Traditional wilderness dates back to Judaeo-Christian history and culture and is even associated with Satan. Moses guided the people of Israel through the wilderness to return home, and even Abraham guided his people into the wilderness in order to establish a society. Therefore, the Judaeo-Christian notion of wilderness incorporates connotations of trial and danger but also purity and freedom (Garrard 60-61).

Wilderness took a new turn in the eighteenth century when the idea of the sublime emerged and gained popularity (Garrard 63). William Cronon labels the sublime as an old and more extensive cultural construct and emphasizes that the sublime has been highly influential in the Romanticism movement (Cronon 9-10). Professor Phillip Shaw examines the meaning and historical significance of the sublime concept in The Sublime. Shaw illustrates how the sublime has many applications; a mountain can be sublime, a thought or expression can be sublime, and a feeling can be sublime. The term denotes a state of mind and describes things that are 'too wonderful' to express, Shaw quoting David in Psalm 139 (Shaw 1). Shaw includes definitions of the concept from the *Oxford English Dictionary*, which defines

it as ‘set or raised aloft; high up’ and how the effect of the sublime can be ‘irresistible’ and ‘overwhelming’ (Shaw 1-2). Generally, the sublime is when “... experience slips out of conventional understanding, whenever the power of an object or event is such that words fail and points of comparison disappear, then we resort to the feeling of the sublime” (Shaw 2). When experiencing feeling sublime, the person encounters a remarkable transformation, a combination of feeling little, feeling big, feeling an intimation of death, and feeling alive (Shaw 4).

John Muir and Ansel Adams are two prominent figures in the traditional trope, and their work has been essential in wilderness preservation and appreciation. Both Muir and Adams are located within the traditional wilderness branch in the wilderness model since they portray wilderness as a pure and pristine place where civilization is omitted. Muir, a Scottish immigrant, was an influential writer who played a significant role in establishing wilderness as an essential part of American cultural identity. Muir is known as the father of national parks since he created Yosemite National Park in 1890 and was involved in creating the Sequoia National Park, Mount Rainier National Park, and Grand Canyon National Park. In 1892, Muir founded the Sierra Club wilderness protection organization, one of America’s most influential environmental organizations (Garrard 67). Creating a wilderness protection organization also reinforces how he fits under the traditional wilderness in the wilderness model since he wants to protect and keep the original and pristine values of wilderness. Some of Muir’s most famous literary works are *My First Summer in the Sierra* (1911), *The Yosemite* (1912), *The Mountains of California* (1894), and *Our National Parks* (1901) (Sierra Club). My *First Summer in the Sierra* is one of Muir’s most well-known works, in which Muir writes about his experiences in the Sierra Nevada mountains. In the book, he portrays a piece of wilderness that is “... sublime domes and canyons, dark upsweeping forests, and glorious array of white peaks deep in the sky, every feature glowing, radiating beauty that pours into our flesh and bones like heat rays from fire” (Garrard citing Muir 67). This quote portrays how deeply connected Muir was with the natural world, showing how the Sierra Nevada Mountains impacted him by their sublimeness, “... glorious array”, and “... radiating beauty”, something greater than himself (Garrard 67). Garrard cites Daniel Payne who states that “... it is hard to overstate the importance of John Muir’s contribution to the wilderness preservation movement” (Garrard 67). Overall, Muir was deeply passionate about wild lands and believed that wilderness areas should not just be exploited; they had their own natural value. He also believed that people are not supposed to rule these wildernesses; instead,

people should visit and experience these wild lands, which Muir believes will help people grow (John Muir Trust).

The other prominent figure in the traditional wilderness trope is Adams, an American photographer known for his pictures of the American West and national parks, especially Yosemite National Park in California. He is connected with Muir as they have created books together; Muir wrote them, and Adams took pictures of them. Adams also supported the preservation of wildernesses and used his photographs to demonstrate the importance of protecting wilderness areas. This notion also underpins that he is placed within the traditional wilderness in the model since his pictures demonstrate that he also viewed nature and culture as two binary opposites. Adams took over 40 thousand photographs, where the black and white photographs of mountains and valleys were his most famous ones (Garrard 69). Of all his photographs, the ten most famous ones are also black and white. These photographs are still extremely popular and loved today, as seen in the Ansel Adams Gallery, which sells his artwork (The Ansel Adams Gallery), which also reinforces that the wilderness trope is still as ingrained in the American people today. His photographs portrayed a pure piece of nature, taken in certain conditions to give the mountains "... monumental quality, allowing them to retain the sublime, immeasurable otherness Muir had praised in the Sierra Range" (Garrard 69). Adams and Muir both played significant roles in America since they portrayed and gave wilderness a new environmental meaning, which makes them essential in regards of the wilderness trope.

Their work, especially Muir's creation of the Sierra Club and the foundation of several national parks, has helped protect and preserve natural land in America. This notion also correlates with how The 1964 Wilderness Act was passed by Congress in order to protect and secure the future of wilderness lands. Not only did the Wilderness Act protect a massive piece of America's federal land, but it also formed a legal definition of the wilderness term as an area that is "... untrammeled by man, where man himself is a visitor who does not remain" (Wilderness Act 2). A piece of wilderness is primarily influenced by forces of nature, a place with ecological value where humanity can find solitude, at least five thousand acres in size (Wilderness Act). Since this act passed, 111 million acres of land were appointed official wildernesses (The Wilderness Society). Regarding the wilderness model, Muir, Adams, and the Wilderness Act are all located in the traditional wilderness branch, as they all focus on preserving natural land that is beautiful, pure, and free of people.

3.2.2. Rethinking wilderness

The wilderness model presents traditional wilderness and new wilderness, where traditional wilderness is based on binary opposites, and new wilderness is trying to view these opposites as a whole. Cronon suggests the necessity for rethinking the notion of wilderness, which places him on the right in the new wilderness branch. In Cronon's article *The Trouble with Wilderness; Or, Getting Back to the Wrong Nature*, he explores the history of the wilderness trope in American culture and argues that the traditional view of wilderness is problematic. This old traditional American view of the wilderness is described as a romanticized and pristine place where civilization has not made its mark and contaminated the land (Cronon 7), which are values of the traditional wilderness branch in the wilderness model. Looking into the history of wilderness, Cronon states how it is not as pristine as one might think; it is "... profoundly a human creation - indeed, the creation of very particular human cultures at very particular moments in human history [...] it is a product of that civilization, and could hardly be contaminated by the very stuff of which it is made" (Cronon 7). Towards the end of the nineteenth century, the wilderness areas in America significantly changed since these once valueless wilderness areas became priceless. "Wilderness had once been the antithesis of all that was orderly and good - it had been the darkness, one might say, on the far side of the garden wall - and yet now it was frequently likened to Eden itself" (Cronon 9). Picturesque and wild places all over America were now trendy, and many of those places experienced transformations and became wildland parks or national parks (Cronon 9). All in all, Cronon is placed in the new wilderness branch in the wilderness model, as he tries to dissolve traditional dualisms; they are problematic because these pristine lands are not as pristine in reality.

Garrard also investigates how it is necessary to look beyond the binary contrast between civilization and wilderness, because traditional fundamental views of the wilderness trope are problematic today. Garrard investigates this notion in his subchapter, beyond wilderness. When describing how some meanings of the wilderness trope have changed, he includes Margaret Atwood's short story *Death By Landscape* in her book *Wilderness Tips* from 1991. Garrard mentions Atwood since she illustrates that wilderness "... can be productively explored in relation to genres other than nature writing" (Garrard 79). In *Death By Landscape*, Atwood can be "... equivocating between the artistic and environmental meanings of 'landscape', and exploring a morbid fascination with the way both paintings and forests recede endlessly" (Garrard 79).

Regarding the fact that traditional wilderness views are problematic, Garrard writes about this new idea of wilderness by presenting the term 'urban wilderness' and 'bringing the 'wild' closer to home' by introducing the deep ecology poet Gary Snyder. These ideas are placed within the new wilderness branch in the wilderness model since he views these dualisms as one instead of two opposites. Snyder became popular in the 1950s, and his works were praised by scholars who stated that his vision and works brought new life to the postmodern world and promoted a new cultural ethic of the wild (Garrard 81-82). Garrard emphasizes how Snyder's upbringing and working as a logger have given his literary works "... a breadth of reference and sensitivity to people's social and material needs that is unusual amongst wilderness writers" (Garrard 82). Another reason Garrard includes Snyder in his subchapter is that Snyder declines the idea of wilderness being only a place of recreation. The binary idea of wilderness and civilization must be changed, which is done by his technique of bringing the wilderness closer to home (Garrard 83). Instead of being two opposites, where civilization is associated with disorder and wilderness is associated with free self-organization, Snyder focuses on the idea that wilderness should be a place where wilderness grows through and sustains people (Garrard 83). This notion proves that Snyder is located in the new wilderness branch in the wilderness model, as he views wilderness and people as a whole, not as two opposites.

3.2.3. A new ecological concept of wilderness

Professor Craig DeLancey proposes a new ecological way of viewing the wilderness concept in his article *An Ecological Concept of Wilderness* from 2012. The traditional concept of wilderness denotes a pristine place untouched by humans; however, DeLancey believes there has yet to be a consensus on how to understand the concept. He proposes five challenges concerning the wilderness concept: it may be inapplicable, it is negative, it is a cultural construct that serves narrow interests, it lacks a clear relation to value theory, and competitive notions appear superior (DeLancey 26). Due to these challenges, DeLancey has created a new ecological concept of wilderness, which contributes to a clear definition of the concept while also providing answers to the challenges above (DeLancey 27). Delancey is placed at the bottom of the wilderness model since his views go beyond the two branches. Additionally, his concept connects the two branches since the concept keeps some traditional wilderness values while moving towards the values of new wilderness.

DeLancey states that the traditional notion of wilderness being untouched by humans is no longer applicable today because humans have been all over the world, even on the moon. Therefore, humans must focus on how the wilderness concept needs to focus more on its richness and the ecosystems inside them (DeLancey 28), which is an essential notion in this newer idea of the wilderness concept. The concept allows the ecosystems to change but is not considered a piece of wilderness if it is being destroyed (DeLancey 30). He proposes a 'powerful, intuitively satisfying definition' of the concept of wilderness:

> The Ecological Concept of Wilderness: a wilderness is an enduring ecosystem that, for the available genotypes and resources, is highly optimal in terms of maximizing both the quantity of flourishing individual organisms and the quantity of kinds of organisms, relative to past historical conditions of that ecosystem (DeLancey 29).

DeLancey firmly states that this new and neutral concept provides clear answers to the five challenges mentioned above regarding older definitions of the concept (DeLancey 31). According to this new concept, a piece of wilderness is a complex ecosystem that should be essential to land ethic (DeLancey 36). Overall, this new ecological concept of wilderness is a powerful ecological tool since it provides people with goals for maintaining these ecosystems (DeLancey 38). This concept goes beyond the traditional and new wilderness in the wilderness model, as it keeps some traditional values while moving toward the newer ones. This notion provides evidence of the continued relevance of the wilderness trope since it keeps being an interest.

To summarize, the wilderness trope is a broad concept to investigate, leading to the wilderness model's formation. The wilderness model creates an overview of the many different theories and views, divided into three branches; traditional wilderness, new wilderness, and beyond wilderness. Garrard investigates the traditional views, stating how wilderness is traditionally viewed broadly as an untouched place with no human presence, in which Muir and Adams are prominent figures. On the other hand, within the branch of new wilderness, Cronon and Snyder look beyond this binary contrast. As the wilderness trope constantly develops, DeLancey's new ecological concept of wilderness has emerged, located beyond wilderness in the model. These theories and concepts have created an overview of the wilderness trope, presented in the wilderness model.

3.3. Contemporary narrative theories

Contemporary narrative theories play an essential role in this thesis since the theories serve as a way to analyze the way Krakauer writes and narrates his stories. Examining key literary techniques in narrative theories creates a deeper understanding of how Krakauer presents the wilderness trope through his narrative and how this narrative shapes the reader's understanding of nature.

When it comes to literary genres, there is a big difference between fiction and non-fiction. Professor of English at the University of Alaska Fairbanks investigates the theory of literary non-fiction. Heyne states, "... Fiction and non-fiction are both narrative and may share all sorts of technical similarities in their constructions of meaning" (Heyne 483). Nevertheless, although literary fiction and non-fiction are similar in some ways, they are fundamentally different, Heyne argues (Heyne 480). Heyne refers to several other scholars to investigate the difference between the two literary genres. He refers to John Searle when proving how a common distinction is seen in the perception of the specific destined statement and not in the characteristics of the statement. The distinction between non-fiction versus fiction affects the reader since the genre impacts not only the story itself but also the social context and the relationship with the author. Regarding non-fiction, the fact that the work is real and not invented affects these latter factors. The reader does not doubt a non-fiction work compared to a piece of fiction. Heyne states that the author decides if a work is fiction or non-fiction, but the reader must decide if the work is 'good or bad fact' (Heyne 480).

When reading a piece of non-fiction, it is also essential to distinguish whether the work should be read and evaluated as fact or as fiction (Heyne 482). Heyne refers to Zavarzadeh, who investigates the reader's difficulty when understanding the truth in narratives. He explores how the modern reader decides whether the story is more or less true (Heyne 484). "The writer of fiction must invent. The journalist must not invent" (Heyne referring to John Hersey 485). This quote does not entail that the non-fiction author can write whatever he or she desires and expect the reader to believe it, but the author's factual status is essential when it comes to the experience of reading non-fiction (Heyne 485).

Within non-fiction narratives, Heyne identifies two kinds of truth; meaning and accuracy. Accuracy refers to the neutral verbal description of events, whereas meaning refers to everything that deals with given facts. Heyne describes accuracy and meaning as two different kinds of strategies or claims in non-fiction narratives (Heyne 486). Meaning and accuracy are significant in non-fiction, but they do not equal

that one version is better than the other. “In order to evaluate a complex non-fiction narrative, it is essential to understand the exact truth-claims being made and how they fit into the author’s overall intentions” (Heyne 488). With his theory of literary non-fiction, Heyne has tried to create a shared understanding of how literary texts serve multiple functions in society today (Heyne 489).

3.3.1. Creative non-fiction narrative approach

Regarding truth in non-fiction, it is essential to investigate a branch within literary genres: creative non-fiction, an effective narrative approach within non-fiction. Wendy Bignold from Liverpool Hope University investigates how creativity in narrative processes affects the story’s validity. She draws information from a doctoral study by Andrew Sparkes, who introduced the term creative non-fiction (Bignold 17-18). Validity refers to the state of something being true, accepted, or reasonable (Cambridge Dictionary). This creative non-fiction narrative form is essential to include in this theoretical framework section of the thesis as it discusses the validity of stories that are “... creative in their use of fictional techniques but are non-fictional in nature, being based on real characters and real events” (Bignold 17), which regards the three books by Krakauer.

Within this narrative approach, Sparkes points out that different levels of creativity will influence the reader’s trust in whether or not the facts are accurate. Ethnographic fiction is a form of narrative that uses literary techniques to make the story captivating. This type is essential in non-fiction since it is an element that can strengthen the validity and credibility of the story (Bignold 18). The validity of non-fiction is fundamental, and when judging the validity of stories, Bignold refers to Arthur P. Bochner’s set of five criteria points, which are:

1. abundant, concrete details in facts and feelings;
2. structurally complex narratives which move between past and present;
3. the author’s emotional credibility, vulnerability and honesty;
4. tales within the story, showing development of self;
5. a high standard of ethical self-consciousness from the author (Bignold 19).

These five criteria points are essential since they affect the story’s validity while allowing it to be creative. Besides investigating validity’s impact in non-fiction, Bignold also includes considerations regarding

ethics in a narrative and the effect creative non-fiction has in education (Bignold 20-21). In general, the authors behind creative non-fiction "... seek to penetrate personalities of real characters, unveil aspects of their experience (and) explicate the social meaning underlying important events" (Barone 28).

However, Bignold emphasizes that the reader must take caution and remember that reflexivity is essential when looking at validity and credibility (Bignold 25). She bases her illustrations of reflexivity on research done by Heikkinen et al. from 2007, who propose five principles for determining the quality of research in regards to narrative (Heikkinen et al. 5) . Reflexivity, which is the second principle, involves several aspects of the narrative that both the reader and author must be aware of. A reflexive author must be transparent and must take into consideration that they need to remind the reader that the narrative is written by him or her (Heikkinen et al. 12). Reflexivity entails awareness from the author that their narrative is a subjective experience which can influence the reader's interpretation both in a positive and enhancing way, but also in a negative and constraining way (Heikkinen et al. 12). As Bignold emphasizes, the author creates the narrative story, which is not an observation, but production of reality based on a personal subjective experience (Bignold 25). Therefore, when looking at the author behind a work, it is crucial to recognize that the narrative is personal, making reflexivity a vital matter to consider.

Considering everything Bignold focuses on makes the narrative form creative non-fiction very complex. She relies on others' research, concluding that validity and credibility are crucial aspects of creative non-fiction since the narrative is about actual facts and reality. When using this particular narrative form, the authors can create a fact-based story that will still captivate the reader by using literary techniques in non-fiction (Bignold 26).

3.3.2. Theory of narrative empathy

The latter theoretical frameworks regarding contemporary narrative theories all share that one of their focal points is the narrative's effect on the reader. Since the three chosen books for this thesis are non-fiction, along with the literature review highlighting how Krakauer can create this personal relationship with the reader, the theory of narrative empathy is essential to include as a theory since it regards the ability to feel empathy with the characters.

This particular theory has gained increasing attention in the genre of non-fiction since the authors can convey factual information while affecting the readers on an emotional level. Suzanne Keen is at the forefront of narrative empathy theory and describes narrative empathy as the feeling the reader gets when

reading another's narrative. The author of a literary work can evoke empathy within the reader by using various strategies and techniques (Keen 127). Narrative empathy study relies on existing research done within psychology, specifically cognitive, social, and developmental psychology (Keen 126) Empathy has roots that link back to the eighteen hundreds, where there was significant interest in how literature evoked shared feelings, such as how George Eliot implemented sympathetic imagination in her novels (Keen 130). The phenomenon was theorized as sympathy, but Keen differentiates narrative empathy from sympathy in her studies, stating how empathy is a version of sympathy (Keen 130). Sympathy is feeling pity or sorrow for someone else, whereas empathy is broader and is generally known as the ability to imagine oneself in another's situation (Dictionary.com).

Keen investigates how literary empathy studies today show how the dispositions, the person's inborn qualities, affect "... the way the other minds of represented persons are constructed and received" (Keen 133). This notion is essential since it has been hypothesized that intersectional identities play a role in narrative empathy. Studies of empathy and literature reading have also proven to be connected since reading contributes to practicing empathy and developing a 'good world citizenship', Keen referring to Martha Nussbaum's notions regarding empathy. Keen somewhat agrees with this viewpoint and states that novel reading can enhance readers' sympathetic imagination (Keen 133).

However, as the interpreter, Keen's narrative empathy theory must be viewed critically. Even though she ends her piece about narrative empathy theory by stating that "... narratives evoking empathy may be non-fictional or fictional" (Keen 134), she only targets her theory toward fictional literature. Therefore, a need for an article that proves empathy can happen in both fiction as well as non-fiction is necessary. Nicola Morgan investigates this notion, focusing mainly on empathy and that both non-fiction and fiction can evoke empathy. She states that the literary genre does not decide whether or not empathy can happen; the level of empathy is caused by how the story makes the reader feel when reading. The reason fiction supposedly often creates more empathy than non-fiction is because there, in general, are more fiction books that can evoke feelings than non-fiction, Morgan states. Non-fiction literature, for example, a manual to build something, does not simply evoke feelings, nor is it meant to. Therefore, empathy depends on how the stories are told, and non-fiction is equally good. The reader can sometimes relate more to the narrative since it is true (Morgan).

The fact that literary techniques are essential to evoke feelings such as empathy within the reader correlates with the latter theory regarding creative non-fiction. Here, Bignold focuses on how specific

techniques in narrative influence the reader. Even though non-fiction leans on actual events, literary techniques can bring the stories to life and make them captivating (Bignold 17). Overall, contemporary narrative theories are important in this theoretical framework section, as they contribute to portraying how an author narrates and makes the story come to life.

Summary of theoretical frameworks

In summary, this theoretical framework section has examined the theoretical frameworks that create a more extensive understanding of the term trope, the wilderness trope, and contemporary narrative theories in literature. The umbrella term, trope, refers to the recurring themes that can develop and transform over time while still being connected to its broader social context. According to Garrard, tropes are important, as they shape people's understanding of the natural world and wilderness. Here, ecocritics acknowledge the importance of illustrating that culture creates nature and that nature is an actual place as well.

The wilderness trope is broad and has changed and gained new meanings over the years, proving how this trope keeps being a concept of interest today. The wilderness model lists all theories within the wilderness trope and demonstrates how all aspects are connected. The model contains three branches; traditional wilderness, new wilderness, and beyond wilderness. Traditional wilderness values are based on binary opposites, where nature is viewed as a pristine and untouched place, as suggested by Muir and Adams. New wilderness tries to dissolve these dualisms; here, Cronon argues that traditional values are problematic, as these romanticized and pristine wilderness areas are not as pristine as one might think. Snyder also challenges traditional wilderness values by arguing that wilderness should be a place that grows through and sustains people, viewing these dualisms as one. The branch beyond wilderness connects the two branches in which DeLancey's new ecological concept of wilderness is located.

Lastly, this theoretical framework includes an account of contemporary narrative theories, as these contribute to showing how literary techniques used in non-fiction affect the reader and evoke feelings. These theories emphasize that the author's way of narrating is essential to investigate, as it demonstrates that the author can shape the reader's understanding of a specific topic while also gaining a deeper meaning. It is through the narrative and literary techniques that Krakauer can present and portray the wilderness trope, which shapes the reader's understanding of nature, which is why narrative theories are essential to include.

Therefore, this whole theoretical framework has provided a theoretical foundation for the thesis and establishes the theories and concepts that will support and create the research. The following literature review demonstrates how this research fits into a larger perspective and can show the available research that has already been done in this field. This literature review is placed after the latter theoretical framework since the framework provides fundamental information that is necessary for the relevance and importance of this research.

4. Literature review

The following literature review aims to investigate existing scholarly reviews, articles, and publications written about Krakauer's three books; *Eiger Dreams*, *Into the Wild*, and *Into Thin Air*. These scholarly works created by academics or reviewers identify essential and recurring themes throughout all the books related to the latter key concepts of the theoretical framework. Hence, this literature review contextualizes the existing literature concerning the wilderness trope and narrative form and provides a nuanced perspective of why this particular field is still immensely relevant today.

Throughout this literary review, I will mainly use peer-reviewed literature and draw information from Noél Merino, the book editor of *Wilderness Adventure in Jon Krakauer's Into the Wild* from 2015. Merino focuses predominantly on Krakauer's most famous book, but he also mentions all of the other works by Krakauer; however, *Into the Wild* is the center of attention of his book. Merino's book is interesting to include in this literature review since it includes numerous academics' and reviewers' opinions and reviews of the three books by Krakauer. It questions and debates why we, as humans, are drawn toward the wilderness, along with how Krakauer's portrayal of the wilderness trope inspires people along with critics worldwide (Merino 9-11). Merino's book is essential for this research since he is an example that the wilderness trope is still very relevant and interesting in America. Merino's book is a part of the *Social Issues in Literature Series*, which "... meets the need for materials supporting curriculum integration. Each title in this distinctive new series examines an important literary work or body of work through the lens of a major social issue" (Amazon). This description shows how the books in this series are designed primarily for educational purposes since it provides necessary information about one author and a specific social issue. Therefore, Merino targets teens and young adults, especially students who are writing assignments, since these books provide everything in this study area that students need to know (Amazon). I will use Merino's book as an example that showcases how the

wilderness trope is such a big part of the consciousness in America that students still write papers about *Into the Wild*. This book gained significant popularity upon its publication and was later renewed in 2007 when adapted into a movie. Therefore, Merino is essential in this literature review since he has written this book for educational purposes, which reinforces the significance of the wilderness trope within the American consciousness.

Merino dedicates a whole chapter in his book to the background and life of Krakauer. Krakauer was born and raised in America and graduated in 1976 from Hampshire College in Massachusetts with a degree in environmental studies. Afterward, he worked and climbed for a few years in a mountain town in Colorado, and throughout his life, he wrote many different pieces. However, significantly his articles for *Outside Magazine* made his name known. He worked for the magazine but had pieces published in other well-known magazines as well. He soon became a well-known writer and is now a famous award-winning author of eight books (Merino 15). Therefore, as an author, Krakauer is an important figure in the literature field of wilderness and adventure. His experiences in nature and outdoor activities have left a mark on his works, which revolve around environmental and wilderness topics.

Krakauer's first book, *Eiger Dreams*, consists of 12 short essays and articles about mountain climbing. When investigating the literature field of this book further, it becomes evident that only a few scholarly articles exist. Merino refers to two reviewers, who both recommend the book, and states how Krakauer's book is genuine and that his respect is earned (Merino 26). One of these reviewers also states how Krakauer "... conveys well the formidable, even terrifying aspects of the sport" (Merino 26). In a newer review from 2014, Allison Pecevich focuses on how the book is both educational and informative by stating that "... Krakauer's quality of writing is phenomenal. The use of vivid, descriptive language provides a real sense of these extreme environments that few people dare to go to" (Pecevich 1). However, she also writes that Krakauer assumes that the reader knows about climbing and mountaineering, which is an issue because the reader does not know all the terms in this field. Pecevich writes how she finds some of the 12 stories to be impersonal; however, the stories that are personal accounts were the ones that had a more "... personal tone and a stronger sense of credibility" (Pecevich 2). Pecevich states that *Eiger Dreams* is an entertaining read, that his writing style is refreshing, and that the book makes mountaineering intriguing and thrilling (Pecevich 1-2). These three reviews of the book all have in common that they view Krakauer as a phenomenal and genuine writer and that his first book is informative.

Looking at reviews of *Into the Wild*, which is Krakauer's third book, it becomes evident that this book is the most popular one, and countless reviews exist. Merino's book revolves around this particular book, which includes many reviews that focus on how the book is a piece of life and death, especially how Krakauer's writing style can make the reader care for the protagonist (Merino 27). Looking at the themes in Merino's book, it becomes evident that his interest lies within Krakauer's wilderness adventures. Not only does Merino include an in-depth description of Krakauer's life, but he also focuses on the wilderness and how Krakauer and the protagonist in the book were alike. When searching the literature field further, David Stevenson from Western Illinois University writes how Krakauer's *Into the Wild* is a compelling story about the connection between McCandless and Krakauer. The author narrates the story with heart and intelligence, and Stevenson emphasizes that the book deserves an in-depth review, which only a few books do (Stevenson 163-164). Stevenson comments on the importance of the wilderness trope in this book and states that "... We are thus once again reminded that the concept of wilderness is ultimately a construct of the human mind" (Stevenson 164). This statement implies that the trope is a social construct created by humans. According to Stevenson, this idealized view of wilderness is based on our cultural values and beliefs towards nature, which can be influenced by cultural factors, which is essential to underline.

David Lombard, a doctoral researcher with a Ph.D. in American literary studies, writes about some of Krakauer's works in his piece published in the *Literary Encyclopedia* in 2022. Lombard writes how Krakauer can create an intimate and personal relationship with the reader by using narrative techniques, which he uses in all his literary works (Lombard 1). Lombard describes *Into Thin Air* as a cathartic book demonstrating how Krakauer underwent an emotional transformation journey. Lombard states that Krakauer regrets that he climbed Mount Everest since the experience was horrible and that venturing into such an extreme piece of wilderness is an 'idealized risk-taking', Lombard referring to Krakauer (Lombard 2). Merino also mentions *Into Thin Air* in his book, stating how it has significantly impacted its readers since it is an inspirational and emotional book that does not romanticize the tragedy on Mount Everest. Merino refers to other reviewers, who respectively write how the book is a piece of great journalism, how the narrative within leaves the reader breathless, and how the book includes a great deal of precision and detail and that it is impossible not to be affected by the book (Merino 28-29). Upon conducting a more comprehensive overview of literary reviews of *Into Thin Air*, John Trombold's article is essential, as it examines the overall themes; nature and narrative. Trombold primarily focuses on the

narrative's importance, highlighting the essential themes; the non-fictional narrative, the structure of storytelling, the figurative representations within, and the cultural aspect (Trombold 89).

Trombold also links his review of *Into Thin Air* to Krakauer's two other books *Eiger Dreams* and *Into The Wild*. These books are correlated because they all deal with the themes of nature, the wilderness, climbing, and heroes (Trombold 97-99). He also underlines how the narrative of climbing Mount Everest calls attention to the social problems and concerns when some people have more opportunities than others who do not have the same privileges (Trombold 91). This notion relates to Lomard's review, in which he cites Roberta Garner's literary book review, wherein she posits that the *Into Thin Air* is masterfully written and characterized by Krakauer's explicitness and transparency. She states that he portrays the wilderness trope as a dangerous and competitive place, transforming climbing Mount Everest into a money-making journey (Lombard 2). All of these latter reviews regarding *Into Thin Air* acknowledge that narrative form as well as wilderness are central themes in the book; the wilderness trope is portrayed as a horrible, competitive, and money-making piece of nature, and the narrative form creates a deeper understanding of this wilderness trope and its relationship with civilization.

This literature review provides a conceptual framework that has created a deeper foundation for this master's thesis since it has highlighted essential themes related to the latter theoretical framework. The literary reviews have illustrated how the wilderness trope, and the narrative form are the most important recurring themes throughout Krakauer's three non-fiction books. They have in common that they all highlight that Krakauer is an outstanding writer and that his narrative form is phenomenal, genuine, and highly personal. This literary review has provided a comprehensive understanding of how the chosen theoretical framework is relevant to the three books, and illustrated how the wilderness trope is still important and relevant today.

5. An ecocritical analysis and discussion of how Krakauer challenges the wilderness trope

This ecocritical analysis and discussion will concern how Krakauer represents the wilderness trope in *Eiger Dreams, Into the Wild,* and *Into Thin Air*. I will analyze how Krakauer systematically challenges and pushes beyond the wilderness trope as it is traditionally known in the US in each book. In order to do that, the theoretical frameworks will be applied to the books in order to investigate how he communicates cultural issues and explores recurring themes; nature, risk, retreat and return, ambition,

and ethical dilemmas. Lastly, the significance of how Krakauer portrays the wilderness trope in each book will be connected to the wilderness model.

5.1. Eiger Dreams

Eiger Dreams is a work of non-fiction literature published in 1992. The book is a collection of essays and articles Krakauer composed over an extended time, and many of those essays were featured in *Outside Magazine* in the 1980s. Krakauer has divided *Eiger Dreams* into an epigraph, an author's note, and a main part. The book's main part contains chapters, where exactly half of them are personal accounts (Krakauer *Eiger* chapters 1, 3, 6, 7, 8, and 12). The other half is either stories about other climbers, historical pieces, or about climbing in general (Krakauer *Eiger* chapters 2, 4, 5, 9, 10, and 11). I will refer to these chapters as pieces throughout this analysis and discussion. Throughout the book, Krakauer explores the themes of climbing, nature, and mountaineering, portraying how these hazardous sports with fatal consequences still are compelling to climbers (Krakauer *Eiger*). Therefore, this analysis will seek to prove that Krakauer portrays a complex wilderness trope, which overall moves beyond wilderness. I will refer to the whole book when examining general themes and notions. However, when analyzing the portrayal of the trope in depth, I have selected chapters 1, 5, 11, and 12 as they each contribute to portraying different aspects of this complex wilderness trope Krakauer depicts in *Eiger Dreams*.

5.1.1. The wilderness trope

Krakauer introduces the wilderness trope to the reader in the title and the book's first pages. The full title of the book: *Eiger Dreams: Ventures Among Men and Mountains*, shortened to *Eiger Dreams* in this thesis, illustrates many things. Firstly, *Eiger Dreams* refer to Krakauer's personal dream of climbing the mountain Eiger in Switzerland. The first piece in the book is also labeled *Eiger Dreams*, which explores his experience of trying to climb the mountain; however, he failed to achieve this (Krakauer *Eiger* 1-14). The mountain Eiger is a challenging mountain to climb (Krakauer *Eiger* 1-2), and titling the book *Eiger Dreams* illustrates how it symbolizes both the challenge of climbing combined with it being a dream and inspiration, where climbers must take risks in order to achieve their dreams. The second part of the title, *Ventures Among Men and Mountains*, illustrates that the book will explore

not just Krakauer's own experiences but many other climber's stories and experiences. Venture refers to going on a risky or bold journey, which reveals that there will be consequences for the people who venture into the wilderness. Therefore, in correlation with the wilderness trope, the overall meaning of the title can be analyzed as a symbol of how climbing comes with obstacles when dreaming big, which sets the tone for the whole book.

The way the title functions as a way of introducing the wilderness trope is also the same case for the book's first pages. The book begins with two epigraphs followed by an author's note, which both function the same way; they establish the tone and theme of the book. The two epigraphs are quotes from the American poet Paul Zweig and the explorer Vilhjalmur Stefansson. The first epigraph reads:

> The oldest, most widespread stories in the world are adventure stories, about human heroes who venture into the myth-countries at the risk of their lives, and bring back tales of the world beyond men … It could be argued … that the narrative art itself arose from the need to tell an adventure; that man risking his life in perilous encounters constitutes the original definition of what is worth talking about (Krakauer *Eiger* vi).

This epigraph demonstrates the notion of retreat and return, seen in how Zweig writes that these adventure stories are about heroes who 'venture' into nature and risk their lives and 'bring back tales'. This example from the quote demonstrates how the notion of retreat and return is prominent, which Zweig also links with risk. 'Myth-countries' refer to the wildernesses, which the human heroes venture into. The human who ventures into the myth country becomes a human hero because of going into it and risking their life; it is the act that produces the hero. This epigraph immediately sets the tone and introduces the idea that the book will not just concern mountains; it will be about the wilderness trope. The second epigraph by Stefansson reads:

> Having an adventure shows that someone is incompetent, that something has gone wrong. An adventure is interesting enough in retrospect, especially to the person who didn't have it; at the time it happens it usually constitutes an exceedingly disagreeable experience (Krakauer *Eiger* vi).

Stefansson states a different aspect about adventure and wilderness in his epigraph compared to Zweig. He states that adventures arise because 'someone is incompetent' or 'something has gone wrong', contrasting traditional notions of wilderness. Additionally, Stefansson writes that an 'adventure is interesting enough in retrospect', stating that an adventure is only interesting after you return. Wilderness or adventure in the traditional wilderness trope is not meant to be 'an exceedingly disagreeable experience'; it is meant to be agreeable. Therefore, these notions contrast traditional wilderness values, as Muir and Adams proposed, who emphasize that nature should help people grow, not be an 'exceedingly disagreeably experience'. These two epigraphs provide an insight into how the book will revolve around adventure stories and that the stories will deal with human heroes who embark into nature and risk their lives. They also illustrate that there will be an exploration of the difference between myth and reality (Krakauer *Eiger* vi), which Garrard also emphasizes can become an issue.

The author's note functions as meta-writing, clarifying why and how Krakauer created this non-fiction book. Here, Krakauer addresses the reader in the book's first part while also providing context about how his interest in climbing emerged and kept being a part of his life throughout college (Krakauer *Eiger* xii). In correlation with narrative theories already accounted for, Bignold and Heikkinen state that the author's validity and credibility are enhanced when reminding the reader that Krakauer is the reader. Krakauer also writes that the aim of writing this book, which he describes as:

> The activity is wrapped in tales of audacity and disaster that make other sports out to be trivial games by comparison; as an idea, climbing strikes that chord in the public imagination most often associated with sharks and killer bees [...] by the end of this book I think the reader will have a better sense not only of why climbers climb, but why they tend to be so goddamn obsessive about it. (Krakauer *Eiger* xi)

This quote from the author's note demonstrates how climbing is linked with risk-taking and disasters, making other sports seem trivial. Krakauer wants to highlight how climbers are passionate about a sport that often comes with many risks but that it also captures and affects 'the public imagination' in a unique way. Additionally, Krakauer states that his book will provide insight into why climbers climb and how they are 'so goddamn obsessive' about it.

5.1.2. Beyond wilderness

In the middle part of the book, Krakauer introduces the wilderness trope in the first piece, also named *Eiger Dreams* as the title, which explores his own experience with climbing the mountain Eiger in Switzerland. This piece is where he first transforms the wilderness trope, as it deals with risk-taking, danger, and failure, which comes to show in the way that the immense power and danger of the mountain defeats Krakauer himself (Krakauer *Eiger* 14). This notion demonstrates that the first piece is located beyond wilderness in the wilderness model, as Krakauer moves beyond traditional wilderness values. In this piece, questions are raised concerning how that specific mountain, located in the middle of civilization, can come to signify wilderness; because the Eiger Mountain does not immediately connote wilderness. Krakauer must explain to the reader how it does that, which he does by beginning the first piece by introducing the mountain:

> IN THE EARLY MOMENTS of *The Eiger Sanction*, Clint Eastwood saunters into the dimly lit headquarters of C-2 to find out who he is supposed to assassinate next [...] they have discovered that "our man will be involved in a climb in the Alps this summer. And we know which mountain he will climb: the Eiger." Eastwood has no trouble guessing which route - "The North Face, of course" (Krakauer *Eiger* 1).

These very first lines in the first piece show that Krakauer wants to explain how iconic the mountain is, which he does by beginning the piece by connecting it to a Clint Eastwood movie. Krakauer made this choice to remind the reader that the mountain is, in fact, a popular one, as it has been in this movie. Therefore, the mountain comes to represent wilderness because of its iconic status where everyone knows about the mountain's north face. It becomes a place of authentic self-knowledge because it allows you to compare yourself with others, who did better, and who climbed what.

After explaining how iconic the Eiger Mountain is, Krakauer continues to describe his personal view and idea of climbing as:

> The problem with climbing the North Face of the Eiger is that in addition to getting up 6,000 vertical feet of crumbling limestone and black ice, one must climb over some formidable

> mythology. The trickiest moves on any climb are the mental ones, the psychological gymnastics that keep terror in check, and the Eiger's grim aura is intimidating enough to rattle anyone's poise (Krakauer *Eiger* 1).

Firstly, this quote depicts the Eiger Mountain as a massive mountain, where the North Face consists of 'crumbling limestone' and 'black ice', which portray the ascent as unpredictable. In an everyday context, black ice refers to the thin, almost invisible layer which causes many accidents. Black ice in a wilderness context symbolizes the invisible dangers that climbers must be aware of, as one misstep can result in death. This notion correlates with how Krakauer compares climbing 6,000 vertical feet with the mountain's invisible mythology. Climbing the mountain Eiger involves that one's mental game is just as important as one's physical skills, which comes to show in the way he writes that the mental part of climbing that keeps the mountain's 'terror' and 'grim aura' embedded in one's brain. This mental reminder of everything that could go wrong when climbing, Krakauer describes it as 'intimidating enough to rattle anyone's poise', which illustrates that Eiger's deathly reputation is always a reminder when climbing it. Hence, this quote illustrates Krakauer's thoughts of climbing the mountain, whose powerful aura symbolizes both the visible and invisible challenges ahead, which strongly contrasts traditional values as implied by Muir.

When Krakauer sees the Eiger mountain from a train in Switzerland for the first time, it is a contrast-filled experience, which he describes as follows:

> The black rock of the Nordwand, sheathed in frost feathers and sprouting icicles in the places where it overhung, fell away dizzyingly into the mists below. If our route turned out to be anything like what we were seeing, we were going to find ourselves in serious trouble. Climbing in such conditions would be desperate if not impossible. (Krakauer *Eiger* 5).

This quote first and foremost illustrates how Krakauer begins to paint this picture of the mountain as 'black', which he also does in the above quote, which is associated with death. Krakauer portrays climbing the mountain as 'impossible' and 'desperate' to explain the risks climbers must face on Eiger. However, he then describes the Nordwand as being covered in 'frost feathers' and 'sprouting icicles' that fall into the 'mists' below. Associating the mountain with white elements: icicles, frost feathers, and

mists denote that Krakauer also sees the beauty of this mountain, which are notions of traditional wilderness. Therefore, this contrast portrays a wilderness trope that Krakauer associates with both death and beauty. This notion proves that he moves beyond wilderness as he still keeps some traditional wilderness values but still acknowledges death as a factor, which is not an option in the traditional wilderness trope.

The notion of retreat and return is a common value in the traditional wilderness trope, in which you return as a better person. However, in the first piece, *Eiger Dreams*, Krakauer fails to climb the mountain, and the reader leaves him in the airplane on the way home (Krakauer *Eiger* 14). Here, he never gets to retreat as he abandons halfway up, which makes his return not even a return. Additionally, when climbing the mountain, Krakauer experienced a couple that failed to climb too (Krakauer *Eiger* 14) and even witnessed a guy falling off (Krakauer *Eiger* 3). He does not come home being a better person, and he does not come home with a new view on life, but he has learned a valuable lesson never to go there again. Therefore, the failure to climb and the emotional consequences he faced afterward contradict traditional notions of retreat and return. Once more, compared with the wilderness trope model, these notions of failure and fear are not associated with traditional wilderness.

Death plays a prominent role in the book in correlation with the notion of retreat and return, proving that Krakauer moves beyond as death prohibits returning. As analyzed in the quotes above, Krakauer associates the mountain Eiger with death, which is portrayed as a risk when climbing: "I've even learned to accept death as a part of life in the mountains" (Krakauer quoting Adrian Burgess *Eiger* 149). Throughout the other stories in the book, death is a central theme, where Krakauer explores different climbers' views of how nature can be both beautiful and deadly. In the 11th piece, Krakauer explores death on the K2 mountain throughout history, particularly in the summer of 1986. In this piece, he refers to Jim Curran, a climber and a filmmaker, who was present at the K2 base camp and witnessed many fatal consequences of climbing K2:

> ... people got killed climbing with fixed ropes and without fixed ropes; people got killed at the top of the mountain and the bottom; old people got killed and young people got killed [...] if anything was common to most of the deaths it was that a lot of people were very ambitious and had a lot to gain by climbing K2 - and a lot to lose as well. (Krakauer *Eiger* 164).

This quote demonstrates how dangerous climbing K2 is and that various factors, such as experience level, age, and skill level, did not matter: death was a common risk. The quote also illustrates how ambitious the climbers were and that their ambitions often led them to their deaths. Therefore, this quote illustrates the deathly risks and dangers climbers must face when climbing K2 and that most climbers need to balance the risks with their ambitions not to die. This notion correlates with how Krakauer states that this mountain was more challenging to climb than any other and had the highest failure rate, and for every two people who tried to climb it, one would die in 1986 (Krakauer *Eiger* 151). Even though the mountain had the highest failure rate, climbers' ambitions and dreams were more important - because it had the high failure rate: not in spite of, but because of. In 1986, "... the summer's death was beginning to give pause to most of the climbers still on the mountain, but for many the lure of the summit proved stronger" (Krakauer *Eiger* 155). This quote correlates with the one above it, as Krakauer writes that even though climbers were aware of the extremely high death rate on the mountain that summer, the 'lure of the summit proved stronger'. This quote shows the idea that the higher the risk, the higher the value of the retreat and return. The more authentic it becomes, the more it becomes like wilderness.

In relation to the two latter quotes, Krakauer writes more broadly and describes the relationship between climbing, risk-taking, and death as a consequence:

> Dealing with risk, walking the fine line, playing a game of ever-escalating brinkmanship - this is what the cutting edge of climbing has always been about. Those who elect to participate in this hazardous pastime do so not in spite of the unforgiving stakes, but precisely because of them (Krakauer *Eiger* 139).

This quote illustrates Krakauer's thoughts on the danger and fatal consequences climbers face in these outdoor activities that do not scare them away; on the contrary, they are still motivated and willing to take these risks. Additionally, most climbers believe they live most authentically when looking death in the eye, which is precisely how Krakauer describes it. The quote also exemplifies climbers' complex relationship with this 'hazardous' sport, as the 'unforgiving' risks make climbing fascinating. Krakauer illustrates how climbers have this mindset that involves extreme risk-taking, which the sport 'has always been about', as their motivation for climbing goes beyond the risks and fatal consequences. They climb

‘not in spite of the unforgiving stakes, but precisely because of them’; it is that logic, the value, and authenticity of the experience increases, which is dehumanizing.

These quotes above regarding the notion of retreat and return make the wilderness trope dehumanizing, which strongly contrasts traditional wilderness values, as proposed by Garrard and Muir. Krakauer illustrates this notion in the 11th piece, where he includes the story of two climbers who received much criticism for selfishly choosing to descend and leave their other teammates to die (Krakauer *Eiger* 162). This story exemplifies how these climbers act dehumanizing and put their needs first at all costs. In the same piece, Krakauer compares these events to a similar incident on the same mountain, where another expedition was trapped in a blizzard and decided to show great acts of heroism by trying to save everyone and not leaving anyone behind (Krakauer *Eiger* 163). The way Krakauer compares these events, they become two contrary examples of dehumanization and heroism in his book, highlighting two ways climbers interact in this wilderness trope. The selfish climbers represent the dehumanizing aspects of the trope, which are not values of the traditional wilderness trope. In contrast, the other climbers represent the humanizing aspect of traditional wilderness, which Krakauer wants to retain. All in all, the recurring theme of death in *Eiger Dreams* portrays how Krakauer highly values traditional wilderness values but moves beyond in the same way suggested by Cronon, who argues that traditional values are problematic, as these romanticized and pristine wilderness areas are not as pristine as one might think.

5.1.3. Environmental ethics and the role of humans

Another key aspect that is a recurring theme throughout the book is the aspect of environmental ethics when climbing mountains and disturbing the wilderness. Environmental ethics concerns the relationship between the environment and humans, and exploring his and other climbers’ attitudes towards nature in *Eiger Dreams* provides insight into how Krakauer portrays it as a complex. An example of how Krakauer portrays environmental ethics negatively is how wilderness areas that once were pristine and pure are now overcrowded with people. This notion comes to show in particular in this quote:

> … all of the pilots now regularly take planeloads of tourists, ordinary vacationers from Philadelphia and Des Moines, on sight-seeing flights to the glaciers. These trips have become so routine, in fact, that cynics suggest that the risk and romance has all but disappeared from

> the job - that glacier flying today isn't much different from driving a cab (Krakauer *Eiger* 63).

In this quote, Krakauer illustrates how modern technology, in this case, helicopters and planes, have enabled people to travel to remote places, which he states have become so common similar to taking a cab. He includes this aspect of the wilderness trope to showcase how these once pure and pristine places a few people could only go to have become easily accessible. Krakauer states that the 'risk and romance has all but disappeared', which clashes entirely with the values of traditional wilderness as suggested by Muir and Adams, as these once pure places have become ordinary. This commercialization correlates with environmental ethics, as these places have been changed into tourist attractions (Krakauer *Eiger* 63), negatively affecting the environment in these wilderness areas.

Krakauer also portrays environmental ethics as an essential aspect when climbing. He does not explicitly express his own opinion of this issue, but he includes stories and people's opinions to showcase how it is an issue. This notion comes to show, which is in correlation with the latter quote, as he acknowledges that the amount of people is causing damage to the natural lands and wildernesses. Regarding this, Krakauer refers to Lowell Thomas, who states:

> … we're up against a fine line in this business [...] It's just a question of whether you can recognize when you're stepping too far over that line. And there are definitely times - usually when we're called upon to rescue climbers who've gotten themselves into trouble - when we step over the line quite a ways, and do things that are extremely marginal (Krakauer *Eiger* 63-64).

Krakauer chooses to include this statement from Thomas because it illustrates how people are up against this 'fine line'. Knowing where this line is and when you are stepping over it is essential, which also correlates with environmental ethics. Krakauer illustrates the issue with the planes flying to the glaciers, as some of these end up crashing because they fly to places they are not supposed to (Krakauer *Eiger* 63). These remote places were once places ordinary people could not visit, but they have now become routine. Krakauer highlights this as a problem regarding environmental ethics because people underestimate its uncertainty and power, which results in stepping over the line. In the quote, Thomas

also states that they are sometimes forced to step over the line when rescuing people in need. Therefore, individuals must balance and be aware of the line because it does not only put themselves at risk; others need to step over the line and risk their own life trying to save the ones overstepping (Krakauer *Eiger* 63-64).

This statement about stepping over the fine line correlates with climbing in general, as it is an aspect many climbers consider. The natural world is important, and many respect it and try to minimize the impact of human activity on the environment. In this sense, Krakauer quotes Rich Fisher, who believes that wildernesses and nature should remain as untouched as they can: "Among the canyoneers I know, there's a very very strong ethic about not disturbing anything in the cliff dwellings" (Krakauer *Eiger* 110). This quote illustrates the environmental ethic of not disturbing anything and preserving the nature they visit, which Muir agrees with, acknowledging the importance of untouched nature. This notion correlates with Krakauer's view of not disturbing and protecting nature, which comes to show in the following analysis of the last piece in *Eiger Dreams.*

5.1.4. Moving beyond wilderness but keeping traditional wilderness values

The last piece in the book, *The Devils Thumb,* is the one piece that stands out compared to the rest for several reasons. Krakauer wrote this piece exclusively for this book, and it is 24 pages long, which is the longest piece in the book compared to the other pieces, which are 14 pages on average. This piece illustrates a strong idea of protecting natural wilderness, as seen in how he treats wilderness respectfully. Lastly, Krakauer depicts the wilderness trope in the story as rough and unpredictable but still beautiful (Krakauer *Eiger* 172+182). He describes arriving at the summit as follows:

> A few minutes later I was standing on a broad rounded ledge. The summit proper, a series of slender fins sprouting a grotesque meringue of atmospheric ice, stood twenty feet directly above. The insubstantial frost feathers ensured that those last twenty feet remained hard, scary, onerous. But then, suddenly, there was no place higher to go. [...] I was on top of the Devils Thumb. Fittingly, the summit was a surreal, malevolent place, an improbably slender fan of rock and rime no wider than a filing cabinet. It did not encourage loitering (Krakauer *Eiger* 186).

This quote illustrates Krakauer's feelings and view when he reached the mountain's summit. He portrays a vivid picture of the summit, containing white 'meringue of atmospheric ice' and 'frost feathers', which are commonly beautiful white objects linked to traditional values. He also portrays the feeling of standing on top of the summit as an 'insubstantial', 'surreal', and 'improbably'. Here, Krakauer portrays an unreal and out-of-this-world experience as there 'was no place higher to go', giving it monumental quality, the same way Adams portrays mountains in his pictures. On the other hand, Krakauer combines this unreal and beautiful portrayal with images of the summit as 'malevolent' and 'hard, 'scary' and 'onerous'. These negative adjectives portray the journey as hazardous and evil. Krakauer describes the summit as extremely tiny and a place that 'did not encourage loitering', illustrating that he could not be on the summit for very long, otherwise, there would be consequences.

Compared to the rest of the pieces in *Eiger Dreams*, Krakauer's personal way of writing non-fiction also really comes to show in the quote above. Krakauer is able to write about a personal experience while affecting the readers on an emotional level. In this case, the reader can also relate more to Krakauer's non-fiction narrative, as it is based on actual events, which allows the reader to relate more to the author, according to Morgan. This notion correlates with the fact that this piece is the only one in the book that deals with being alone in the wilderness. Krakauer finishes the book with this piece, which contrasts the rest, as it explores his own experience with climbing the Devils Thumb mountain in total solitude. He describes how he experiences solitude as:

> The closest thing I'd had to human contact since the airdrop, the distant lights set off a flood of emotion that caught me completely off guard. [...] When I lay down to sleep I was overcome by a soul-wrenching loneliness. I'd never felt so alone, ever (Krakauer *Eiger* 184-185).

This quote underlines how remote this wilderness is located. The way he describes the deep loneliness in this quote affects the reader and makes the reader feel empathy towards his 'soul-wrenching loneliness' that caught him off guard. In general, this piece is highly personal as it deals with Krakauer's own personal feelings and struggles when climbing the mountain. Climbing alone with only his judgment and no one to save him if he takes the wrong step adds another layer of risk. Personal growth, challenges, obtaining the notion of retreat and return, and a respect for pure nature are all traditional values that

characterize Krakauer's journey. Therefore, this last piece, *The Devils Thumb*, contrasts all the other pieces in the book, as Krakauer overall illustrates that the traditional trope continues.

Krakauer calls the reader's attention to an interpretation of the trope that is wrong by challenging traditional values in all of the pieces except the last piece. Concerning the wilderness model, this last piece is positioned in the traditional wilderness branch. Here, Krakauer portrays the wilderness trope as one where he takes reality into account and takes risk seriously, clearly distinguishing between trope and reality. However, in the other pieces, he portrays the wilderness trope as risk-filled with fatal consequences, and in the traditional wilderness trope, there should not be this type of risk involved. Krakauer critiques the idea that traditional wilderness has been taken over by risk and that it only counts as authentic when looking death in the eye, which strongly contrasts traditional values, as suggested by Muir and Adams.

Summary of the analysis of *Eiger Dreams*

To summarize, Krakauer portrays a complex wilderness trope in *Eiger Dreams*. The wilderness trope is the main theme throughout, which Krakauer introduces in the title, the epigraphs, the author's note, and every piece. He begins the book with two epigraphs that respectively illustrate how venturing into the wilderness produces the human hero and how it is only interesting when returning. They illustrate that there is a difference between myth and reality, which becomes a recurring theme throughout.

The first piece explores Krakauer's own experience with climbing Eiger Mountain, which he fails to climb. Here, he portrays the wilderness trope as beautiful but also associates it with failure and death, which makes it complex, as it challenges traditional values, as suggested by Muir. In fact, Krakauer moves beyond traditional values in the many following pieces, as these deal with death being a common risk of climbing. Here, Krakauer explores the idea that the higher the risk, the higher the value of the retreat and return. People seem to climb not in spite of the stakes but because of them, which is a dehumanizing view that contrasts traditional values. It is the humanizing aspect Krakauer wants to retain, which comes to show in the last piece *The Devils Thumb*, which is an example of how the traditional trope continues. Here, Krakauer explores solitude, a respect for nature, and succeeding at the retreat and return. Therefore, this piece stands out from the rest, and it calls for an interpretation of the trope that is wrong in the rest, as these portray a wilderness trope that is risk-filled where death is expected.

This analysis of *Eiger Dreams* has shown that the wilderness trope is complex, as it is a collection of pieces that systematically tries different interpretations of the wilderness trope. On the one hand, Krakauer respects nature and underlines the importance of traditional wilderness values. However, on the other hand, he acknowledges that commercialization, risk, and death disturb these traditional values but are unavoidable in some places today. Additionally, Krakauer does not try to dissolve these dualisms either, which proves that he portrays a wilderness trope that does not fit in any of the branches in the wilderness model; he overall moves beyond.

5.2. Into the Wild

Into the Wild is a non-fiction book written by Krakauer, published in 1996, and is the story of Christopher McCandless, who decided to leave his life and society and embark on an adventure into the wilderness of Alaska. He abandoned his car, burned his money, and hitchhiked through America to Alaska, where he lived in an abandoned bus for 112 days. Krakauer wrote the story by relying on research, information from people who knew him, and from McCandless' own journal, letters, postcards, and photographs. This information enabled Krakauer to write about the events and decisions that made McCandless leave everything while trying to understand his nuanced soul (Krakauer *Wild*). The book regards many different aspects of McCandless' life, all trying to illustrate what killed him. The central theme of the book is the wilderness trope, where Krakauer explores nature, adventure, the complex relationship between nature and society, the pursuit of freedom, self-discovery, and death. Analyzing all these focal points will contribute to illustrating how Krakauer portrays the wilderness trope in the book.

5.2.1. Structure

Krakauer does not structure his book chronologically, making the narrative form a non-linear narrative. This narrative form is evident since the storytelling moves back and forth between events in McCandless's life. Krakauer divides the book into four parts: an author's note, a middle part with 18 chapters, an epilogue, and an acknowledgements. The author's note is an integral part of this book, as it provides a short overview of who McCandless was and what happened to him, along with the reasoning behind the creation of the biography (Krakauer *Wild* ix-xi). This author's note establishes the book's themes while demonstrating why Krakauer wrote the story of McCandless while combining it with his

own experiences to shed light on the mysterious and nuanced person he was (Krakauer *Wild* ix-xi). Illuminating the structure also demonstrates that Krakauer is creative in his use of structuring his non-fiction book, which can bring his story to life and make it captivating, as implied by Bignold.

Every chapter begins with a title of a location that resembles where the chapter takes place. Each chapter also contains one or two quotes at the beginning of each chapter, which can be divided into two categories; quotes written or influenced by McCandless and quotes from literary authors such as Muir and Thoreau. The quote in chapter one reads;

> April 27th, 1992. *Greetings from Fairbanks! This is the last you shall hear from me Wayne. Arrived here 2 days ago. It was very difficult to catch rides in the Yukon Territory. But I finally got here. Please return all mail I receive to the sender. It might be a very long time before I return South. If this adventure proves fatal and you don't ever hear from me again I want you to know you're a great man. I now walk into the wild. Alex.p* (Krakauer *Wild* 3).

The first quote in the book is a postcard written by McCandless in 1992. This particular quote from chapter one gives essential context to the reader before reading the book. The postcard establishes the date and location of where McCandless is, along with information about how he embarked into the wilderness somewhere close to Fairbanks and that he will not come back anytime soon. By writing that there is a possibility that the 'adventure proves fatal', reveals how McCandless acknowledges death as a part of the wilderness trope he is about to venture into. Krakauer includes these quotes at the beginning of each chapter throughout the book for several reasons; they establish the theme of the chapter, are examples of Krakauer's creative non-fiction writing style, and give the reader an insight into what the chapter will concern. In a larger context, these quotes create a foundation for the reading experience by creating a cohesive narrative and deeper understanding of Krakauer's purpose, as they are all tied together by the wilderness trope.

5.2.2. The wilderness trope

Into the Wild is a biography that contains actual facts and documentation about the life of McCandless, and the central theme throughout is the wilderness trope. Chapter one begins in medias res, where the reader is plunged into the story of McCandless venturing into the Alaskan wilderness

(Krakauer *Wild* 3-5). The next chapter concerns the discovery of McCandless' dead body, where they identified starvation as the cause of death (Krakauer *Wild* 9-14). The choice of already revealing the discovery of his body demonstrates several notions:

1. It is an example of foreshadowing, as it reveals what happens to the main character
2. It establishes the tone of the book, that the wilderness trope will be the central theme.
3. The implied reader arguably already knows about his death, which allows the reader to fully understand the reasoning behind why he embarked into the wilderness and what led to his death.
4. To the people who do not fully know the story of McCandless from the news or the *Outside Magazine* article (Krakauer *The Story on Everest - Into Thin Air*); it creates a form of mystery and interest in the reason why he died, keeping the reader engaged.

The story also ends in the wilderness trope, where the last chapters also deal with his death (Krakauer *Wild* 187-198), and the epilogue dealing when Krakauer and McCandless' parents visited the bus in Alaska (Krakauer *Wild* 199-202). This notion enhances the fact that the wilderness trope is the main theme throughout. Therefore, Krakauer's choice of starting the book by revealing that McCandless dies allows the reader to get a deeper and more nuanced reading experience. Again, it demonstrates that Krakauer highly utilizes creative non-fiction techniques, all in order to influence the reader.

Traditional wilderness values are present in how McCandless searches for this pure and pristine piece of nature, which correlates with Muir and Adams's notions of nature, who saw beauty in wild and pristine lands without people contaminating it. Thoreau, Muir, and London highly inspired McCandless, as he was deeply inspired by them, as seen in the literature he read. However, his reasoning for going into the wilderness was different:

> Unlike 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 own soul. He soon discovered, however, what Muir and Thoreau already knew: An extended stay in the wilderness inevitably directs one's attention outward as much as inward, and it is impossible to live off the land without developing both a subtle understanding of, and a strong emotional bond with, that land and all it holds (Krakauer *Wild* 182).

This quote demonstrates that McCandless admired and respected Muir and Thoreau and compared his journey with theirs, but his reasoning for embarking into the Alaskan wilderness was quite different. Krakauer states that McCandless ventured into the wilderness to 'explore the inner country of his owl soul', referring to the inner part of his soul that has not been discovered. This quote also demonstrates that McCandless did not attempt to go to the Alaskan wilderness due to outside factors or opinions; he did it for himself and his own dreams, which correlates to traditional values, as suggested by Muir.

The relationship between civilization and nature is a key aspect of wilderness theories in general, and it is also a key aspect of *Into the Wild*. This relationship relates to traditional wilderness values, where nature and humans are contrasting factors. One of the main reasons why McCandless ventures into the wilderness is because he wants to escape from society and thinks he could get a more meaningful life in nature. Krakauer's way of describing McCandless's choice of wanting to live a more authentic life in the wilderness comes to show in this quote:

> The trip was to be an odyssey in the fullest sense of the word, an epic journey that would change everything [...] 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. [...] 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 (Krakauer *Wild* 22-23).

In this quote, Krakauer writes how McCandless wanted to create a new life by venturing into the Alaskan wilderness. The journey was to be 'an odyssey in the fullest sense of the word', denoting it would be an adventure-filled, physical, and spiritual journey. The quote also demonstrates that he wanted to escape from his previous life in society, escaping from all the expectations of his parents and society. Therefore, he wanted to go where he could be 'unencumbered' and 'emancipated' from the modern world he did not fit into. Lastly, the quote also illustrates the transition point of breaking free from his previous life, and by adopting the new name, he begins his 'epic journey that would change everything'.

In correlation with the latter quote, McCandless writes in a letter, “I’ve decided that I’m going to live this life for some time to come. The freedom and simple beauty of it is just too good to pass up” (Krakauer *Wild* 34). This quote illustrates that McCandless is determined to live this free and simple life ‘for some time to come’. He escaped his previous life to live in freedom, proving that McCandless has a positive approach to life and what will come. However, the fact that he writes that he will live this ‘life for some time to come’ is not linked with the notion of retreat and return, as he has no plans to return. Not planning to return contrasts traditional values of retreat and return, emphasizing that you go into the wilderness and return as a better person. On the contrary, McCandless does not view these traditional dualisms as one. Therefore, the wilderness trope begins to move beyond traditional values, as suggested by Muir, because McCandless does not have plans to return.

5.2.3. A complex wilderness trope that moves beyond

As established above, the wilderness trope in *Into the Wild* immediately draws parallels to traditional wilderness values. However, when investigating McCandless and his adventure into the Alaskan wilderness, it becomes evident that Krakauer portrays his case as complex and one that moves beyond the wilderness trope. As analyzed above, there is a strong contrast between civilization and wilderness at the beginning of the story of McCandless, as he ventures into the wilderness to escape from civilization. However, this fact is heavily critiqued as it turned out that the touristed Denali Park was just 16 miles south from the bus, and even four cabins were scattered nearby (Krakauer *Wild* 164). These facts prove that the McCandless camp he referred to as being in the wilderness was, in fact, close to civilization, which correlates with Cronon’s view of wilderness, as he too questions how romanticized and untouched natural lands were not as untouched as assumed initially. Therefore, McCandless’ idea of wilderness comes to mean something different; it moves beyond. McCandless’ own thoughts about what he defines as wilderness comes to show when one of McCandless’ friends states:

> Chris “was born into the wrong century. He was looking for more adventure and freedom than today’s society gives people”. In coming to Alaska, McCandless yearned to wander uncharted country, to find a blank spot on the map. In 1992, however, there were no more blank spots on the map - not in Alaska, not anywhere. But Chris, with his idiosyncratic logic,

> came up with an elegant solution to this dilemma: He simply got rid of the map. In his own mind, if nowhere else, the *terra* would thereby remain *incognita* (Krakauer *Wild* 173).

This quote illustrates that McCandless longed for adventure and freedom, which he felt the society he lived in could not provide. The society he lived in, and the time, was a place where everything was mapped and explored, and it was, therefore, hard for him to find an unexplored place, which led to him getting rid of the map. Krakauer illustrates that 'the terra would thereby remain incognita', denoting that the territory would remain unknown in McCandless' own mind. He got rid of the map and created his own idea of unexplored wilderness land. This notion clashes with the reality of the wilderness area where the bus was, as "... the wilderness surrounding the bus—the patch of overgrown country where McCandless was determined "to become lost in the wild"—scarcely qualifies as wilderness by Alaska standards" (Krakauer *Wild* 164). This quote correlates with the statement about Denali Park above, and again it proves how the wilderness area he lived in was, in fact, not as pristine and pure as he painted it to be. Getting rid of the map and creating his own idea of wilderness turns it into a kind of pretense. Krakauer critiques this and suggests that McCandless misunderstands wilderness, which comes to show in the two latter quotes. Krakauer reminds the reader that wilderness is a trope but is still very real, and people like McCandless get it wrong because they cannot differentiate between reality and myth. Garrard and other ecocritics also acknowledge the importance of illustrating that culture creates nature but that nature is an actual physical piece of land too.

The way McCandless lived in a bus in the wilderness is another aspect that makes the wilderness trope move beyond traditional values. His decision to settle down and live in the abandoned bus is not a value in the traditional wilderness trope, as it contrasts traditional values of living in an entirely untouched place. A Fairbanks company placed this bus there, which served as a shelter for hunters in that land (Krakauer *Wild* 10). McCandless came across the abandoned bus on May 1st, consisting of a sleeping bunk and a barrel stove, enabling McCandless to sleep in a bed and stay warm. Previous bus guests had even left other living essentials, such as matches, which made his adventure easier (Krakauer *Wild* 162). Therefore, the choice of living in the bus demonstrates how McCandless' desire to live entirely in the pristine and pure wilderness is disturbed by the bus, as civilization put this there. This notion correlates with what he brought with him on his adventure:

> As he trudged expectantly down the trail in a fake-fur parka, his rifle slung over one shoulder, the only food McCandless carried was a ten-pound bag of long-grained rice [...] The heaviest item in McCandless's half-full backpack was his library: nine or ten paperbound books [...] Among these volumes were titles by Thoreau and Tolstoy and Gogol, but McCandless was no literary snob: He simply carried what he thought he might enjoy reading [...] Having neglected to pack writing paper, he began a laconic journal on some blank pages in the back of *Tanaina Plantlore* (Krakauer *Wild* 161).

This quote demonstrates that McCandless was unprepared for his journey in the Alaskan wilderness, as the only food he brought was rice. He also carried a rifle, and his backpack was half full of only books. McCandless only brought books he would appreciate reading on his journey, illustrating that he chose to bring literary books such as Thoreau over practical survival books. The fact that his backpack was only half-full shows how he could easily have taken more necessary items to survive. Even though Krakauer emphasizes with him, the reality of wilderness undercuts that; he cannot survive on what he brought with him. His unpreparedness clearly illustrates how McCandless is being driven by the myth of the wilderness trope, as mentioned above.

Another aspect of the story that proves that it moves beyond wilderness is that the wilderness trope becomes the antagonist, as it is where McCandless experiences lots of resistance. Some of these challenges are; when the moose he killed rotted (Krakauer *Wild* 166), starvation (Krakauer *Wild* 14), problems with solitude (Krakauer *Wild* 188), and failing to cross the river (Krakauer *Wild* 168-169). These types of resistance he experiences are generally not aspects of the traditional wilderness trope; for example, as implied by Muir, who states that the wilderness trope should help the individual grow, not entail obstacles. All these aspects tries to tell him that he does not belong there because the wilderness he once embarked into was now a place he felt trapped inside of:

> **DAY 100! MADE IT!"** he noted jubilantly on August 5, proud of achieving such a significant milestone, "BUT IN WEAKEST CONDITION OF LIFE. DEATH LOOMS AS SERIOUS THREAT. TOO WEAK TO WALK OUT, HAVE LITERALLY BECOME TRAPPED IN THE WILD.—NO GAME. (Krakauer *Wild* 194).

This quote demonstrates that he reached his milestone of living in the Alaskan wilderness for 100 days. However, this milestone was not to be celebrated, as McCandless was in his worst state of life, and that 'death looms as serious threat'. He writes that he was too weak to go out and gather food, illustrating that he was starving. When analyzing the specific way he writes in the quote, he uses capitalization, bold writing, and exclamation marks to emphasize the gravity of his situation. In general, McCandless has antagonistic traits, as he romanticizes the wilderness, making him unprepared for the journey, which Cronon emphasizes as problematic. This notion correlates with the fact that he dies, which can be interpreted as the wilderness trope literally killing him (Krakauer *Wild* 186-198). Many things contributed to his death; it is not someone, nor himself solely, nor nature that killed him; it is a myriad of aspects in the wilderness trope that resulted in his death. Death prohibits the notion of retreat and return, which becomes the primary reason why *Into the Wild* is not positioned in the traditional branch of the wilderness model.

Another aspect of the book that proves how McCandless moves beyond the traditional wilderness trope is how he experiences solitude. Krakauer quotes McCandless' own writing regarding refuge in nature:

> And 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 this was the most vexing of all [...] HAPPINESS ONLY REAL WHEN SHARED (Krakauer *Wild* 188).

This quote is McCandless's words, illustrating that he realized too late that a wholesome and 'genuine' life is supposed to be shared with others, and being alone in the wilderness prevents this. Even though McCandless wanted to be closer to nature and escape his life in society, spending over 100 days alone in the Alaskan wilderness made him think about how he could not share anything with anyone. This quote is a reminder that happiness is only real when sharing it with others, making human relationships and experiences with them a key factor in living a meaningful life, which is tragic to realize towards the end of his life. This notion relates to McCandless' unpreparedness, as this awareness is something you realize in the wilderness, and then you return. However, McCandless could not return as he was in the weakest condition of his life (Krakauer *Wild* 194).

5.2.4. Environmental ethics

Environmental ethics is a significant aspect of the book that contributes to a deeper understanding of the wilderness trope McCandless depicts. Analyzing environmental ethics in the book shows how he treats and respects the nature he ventures into, which turns out to be complex. In the author's note, Krakauer informs the reader at the very beginning that he "... will leave it to the reader to form his or her own opinion of Chris McCandless" (Krakauer *Wild* xi). This notion is essential to highlight because Krakauer experienced that people have different views of McCandless; some thought he was a narcissistic idiot full of arrogance and stupidity, while others admired him greatly (Krakauer *Wild* xi). This notion correlates with the environmental aspect of his journey, as Krakauer both portrays McCandless as one who profoundly respects the environment and wilderness; however, some aspects of his journey prove the opposite.

Krakauer portrays McCandless as one who was very aware of his presence in society and both respected nature while seeing the beauty in wilderness lands. He also limited his environmental impact, as he hitch-hiked, and sailed in a secondhand canoe (Krakauer *Wild* 32). When his parents gifted him a new car as a graduation gift, he declined because his own secondhand bought car was doing just fine (Krakauer *Wild* 20). Another place that portrays how he tries to minimize his environmental impact is how he wants to avoid going to the Alaskan wilderness by plane. A former work-giver says that McCandless said this would wreck his whole trip because flying would be cheating, which is why he wanted to travel by hitch-hiking (Krakauer *Wild* 68).

On the contrary, McCandless' unpreparedness, his recklessness, and when the moose rotted are instances that prove how he did not care about his environmental impact. McCandless' lack of preparation is a notion Krakauer explores throughout the book, and he often brings others' perspectives on McCandless' case. For example, Krakauer quotes two Alaskan hunters, who state that McCandless was stupid, ridiculously unprepared, incompetent, and had no business venturing into any wilderness (Krakauer *Wild* 176). Traditional wilderness notions regarding leaving civilization contrast his lack of preparation and how he lived in a bus, as these aspects connected him to society. When living in the bus, he did not authentically live in the wilderness and respected and treated it as though. He had long-term plans for the land, where he wanted to map the whole area, build a bathtub, and construct a bridge at a nearby creek (Krakauer *Wild* 164-165). These plans illustrate that McCandless' original desire was to

embark on a journey in its most natural state, but that these aspects disturb the values of the traditional wilderness trope since they are not examples of pristine and pure nature, as proposed by Adams and Muir.

Another aspect of the book that demonstrates McCandless' reflections on environmental ethics is when the moose rotted. McCandless killed a moose but did not preserve it correctly, which made it rot and become inedible (Krakauer *Wild* 166). This notion correlates with environmental ethics as it questions his way of handling the natural resources in the wilderness.

> I now wish I had never shot the moose. One of the greatest tragedies of my life." At that point he gave up on preserving the bulk of the meat and abandoned the carcass to the wolves. Although he castigated himself severely for this waste of a life he'd taken, a day later McCandless appeared to regain some perspective, for his journal notes, "henceforth will learn to accept my errors, however great they be. (Krakauer *Wild* 166).

This quote demonstrates how McCandless deeply regretted that he shot the moose as he failed at preserving it correctly. When killing an animal, it is crucial to preserve it correctly and use every piece, which relates to how he respects the wilderness he lives in. McCandless was aware of the animal life he killed and wasted, which became one of the 'greatest tragedies' he ever experienced. However, the quote also illustrates that he acknowledged his mistakes and saw an opportunity to learn from them. This tragedy and the aspect of environmental ethics demonstrate that McCandless values principles of the traditional wilderness trope, as his journey was created by a sincere interest in living in pure wilderness. However, he made choices in the wilderness, illustrating that he was unprepared and disrespected nature, proving that *Into the Wild* is not located in the traditional wilderness branch in the wilderness model; it moves beyond.

5.2.5. Krakauer's connection with McCandless

An essential aspect of the book is Krakauer's personal relationship with McCandless because they did not know each other. At the beginning of the book, Krakauer reveals how there are parallels between their lives, which makes the story personal to him: "I interrupt McCandless's story with fragments of a narrative drawn from my own youth. I do so in the hope that my experiences will throw some oblique

light on the enigma of Chris McCandless" (Krakauer *Wild* x). Establishing similarities between them allows the reader to understand the choices McCandless made, as Krakauer made similar choices. This choice relates to narrative empathy since the reader can relate more to Krakauer's personal narrative in the book. Stating in the beginning that Krakauer will compare his life with McCandless influences the reader's interpretation of the narrative and the author's validity and credibility, according to Bignold and Heikkinen.

There are similarities and differences between Krakauer and McCandless, and as established above, Krakauer relies on documentation, but his "... sense of Chris McCandless's intentions comes, too, from a more personal perspective" (Krakauer *Wild* 134). This notion demonstrates how Krakauer compares himself with McCandless on a more personal level.

> As a young man, I was unlike McCandless in many important regards; most notably, I possessed neither his intellect nor his lofty ideals. But I believe we were similarly affected by the skewed relationships we had with our fathers. And I suspect we had a similar intensity, a similar heedlessness, a similar agitation of the soul (Krakauer *Wild* 154).

This quote demonstrates how Krakauer believes they are similar in the way that they both had the same 'intensity', 'heedlessness', and 'agitation of the soul'. On the other hand, the quote also illustrates that Krakauer differs, as he does not have the same intellect and 'lofty ideals' as McCandless.

Their similarities and differences especially come to show in Krakauer's choice to include his own story of climbing the Devils Thumb in Alaska in chapters 14 and 15 (Krakauer *Wild 1*33-155). These chapters explore Krakauer's own account of the Alaskan wilderness, which is the same story from *Eiger Dreams* analyzed above. In correlation with the latter quote, Krakauer writes:

> When I decided to go to Alaska that April, like Chris McCandless, I was a raw youth who mistook passion for insight and acted according to an obscure, gap-ridden logic. I thought climbing the Devils Thumb would fix all that was wrong with my life. In the end, of course, it changed almost nothing. But I came to appreciate that mountains make poor receptacles for dreams. And I lived to tell my tale (Krakauer *Wild* 154).

This quote illustrates Krakauer's motivation for going to Alaska to climb the Devils Thumb. In this quote, Krakauer shows how they both were young and goal-oriented and 'acted according to an obscure, gap-ridden logic'. Many thought of McCandless as stupid and idiodic (Krakauer *Wild* xi), and if Krakauer died too, people would think that he had a death wish as well (Krakauer *Wild* 154). Therefore, comparing himself with McCandless illustrates this latter idea that he draws from his own experiences to "... throw some oblique light on the enigma of Chris McCandless" (Krakauer *Wild* x). Krakauer survived his risk-filled journey on the Devils Thumb mountain and 'lived to tell my tale'. In the latter quote, Krakauer also writes that he thought that the mountain 'would fix all that was wrong with my life', which shows that Krakauer believed that it would be a life-changing experience; however, it turned out to change 'almost nothing'. He states that he found out that he 'came to appreciate that mountains make poor receptacles for dreams', which indicates that the experience within himself matters and is life-changing. This notion correlates with the second piece in *Eiger Dreams*, which demonstrates that everyone can experience wilderness. The story involves a man who only climbs boulders less than a few meters and still gets the same feeling from climbing mountains, which shows that wilderness means something entirely different for him, as it is in his mind (Krakauer *Eiger* 15-27).

As analyzed above, the notion of retreat and return is a key theme in *Into the Wild* as McCandless dies. In correlation with Krakauer's own story of climbing the Devils Thumb, the two stories are very different as Krakauer returns and McCandless does not. Krakauer's journey was only to summit, go down, return to society, and not spend over 100 days and not return:

> I had planned on spending between three weeks and a month on the Stikine Ice Cap. Not relishing the prospect of carrying a four-week load of food, heavy winter camping gear, and climbing hardware all the way up the Baird on my back, I had paid a bush pilot in Petersburg $150—the last of my cash—to have six cardboard cartons of supplies dropped from an airplane when I reached the foot of the Thumb (Krakauer *Wild* 139-140).

The quote establishes that Krakauer intends to spend between three to four weeks there, demonstrating that the notion of retreat and return is present in Krakauer's story. The fact that Krakauer explicitly states that he pursues the notion of retreat and return strongly contrasts McCandless, as he decided to stay in the wilderness for an unknown time (Krakauer *Wild* 34). Additionally, the quote demonstrates a

significant difference in the two stories' level of preparedness; Krakauer came prepared for his journey, and McCandless did not. The quote shows that Krakauer was prepared for his three-four week journey, as he brought essential gear and food. He also had a deal with a pilot who would deliver the supplies he needed to reach the summit.

Therefore, the comparison reinforces the trope in *Into the Wild* since Krakauer also depicts it as beautiful and risk-filled in his portrayal of the journey on the Devils Thumb (Krakauer *Wild* 151-152). The comparison enhances how McCandless misinterpreted the wilderness trope and how he could not separate the trope from reality, which is a problem, according to Garrard. Furthermore, Krakauer's preparedness starkly contrasts McCandless' case, as his story of climbing the Devils Thumb values traditional values. Therefore, comparing the two stories enhances the notion that Into the Wild moves beyond the traditional wilderness trope.

Summary of the analysis of *Into the Wild*

In summary, Krakauer's representation of the wilderness trope in *Into the Wild* overall demonstrates how the wilderness trope is a key theme throughout the book. Krakauer portrays a complex and nuanced trope introduced in the first chapter and establishes the book's tone. McCandless' death is also presented in the beginning, allowing the reader to get a more nuanced understanding of his choices.

The traditional wilderness trope is present in the story as McCandless searches for a more pure and pristine way of living in the Alaskan wilderness, which correlates with Muir and Adam's ideas of nature. Additionally, he escapes society, believing he can live more authentically in nature. However, the analysis reveals how Krakauer critiques McCandless' choices, proving that the wilderness trope Krakauer depicts moves beyond traditional values. This notion comes to show in several places; when McCandless decides to live in the Alaskan wilderness with no intention of returning, how he was close to civilization, his unpreparedness, the way the wilderness trope becomes the antagonist in the story, and lastly, his way of mistreating wilderness. Therefore, by analyzing how he lives in the Alaskan wilderness, it becomes clear that creating his own idea of wilderness turns it into a pretense. Krakauer critiques McCandless' choices in this sense, suggesting he misunderstands wilderness as he cannot differentiate between reality and myth.

Lastly, the aspect of Krakauer's personal connection with McCandless highlights that they were similar but also very different. They have the same drive and are both very goal-oriented; however, they

contrast due to their intention of staying in the wilderness, their preparedness, and the notion of retreat and return. Therefore, including his personal story and comparing it with McCandless' story enhances how McCandless misinterpreted the wilderness trope. Overall, the wilderness trope in *Into the Wild* is a trope without reflection and reality; it is a wilderness trope that moves beyond in the wilderness model.

5.3. Into Thin Air

Into Thin Air is a non-fiction memoir by Krakauer, published in 1997. The book is a personal account that chronicles his experience as a climber during the Mount Everest disaster in 1996. His job at *Outside Magazine* made his dreams of climbing the mountain come true by writing an article about the commercialization of the mountain. However, a sudden storm caused eight climbers to die when climbing the mountain. Therefore, Krakauer created the book in which he writes in-depth about the choices that were made on the mountain and which factors played a role in the disaster (Krakauer *Air*). The memoir explores the themes of mountaineering, ambition, endurance, ethical dilemmas, the power of nature, and the fatal consequences of interfering with wilderness. Additionally, this analysis will explore how he, as a writer, enhances the understanding of the trope by creating a personal narrative with creative non-fiction characteristics.

5.3.1. Structure

The memoir's structure is essential to analyze first, providing a basis for understanding the coming analysis. When first looking at the structure, Krakauer has divided it into a preface, a middle part consisting of 21 chapters, an epilogue, a postscript, and an author's note (Krakauer *Air*). However, after reading the memoir, it becomes evident that there is more to it, and some chapters function in a specific way. Therefore, my own interpretation of the structure is; a preface, a dramatis personae list, a flash-forward, a prologue, a central part, an epilogue, a postscript, and an author's note. Some of these are my own interpretive terms, which I will refer to throughout this analysis.

The memoir begins with the preface, which summarizes the story (Krakauer *Air* XI-XIII) and serves several purposes. Firstly, the preface enables Krakauer to establish his part of the story to come and why he was able to go on this expedition. He writes how he based the memoir on his own experiences and writes that he intended to write the book with immense honesty and truth; "I wanted my account to

have a raw, ruthless sort of honesty that seemed in danger of leaching away with the passage of time and the dissipation of anguish" (Krakauer *Air* XIII). He wanted to write a memoir that portrayed his unfiltered emotions about his experience. Therefore, he includes every detail and does not exclude aspects too painful to include, which are fundamental regarding the validity of non-fiction, as implied by Bignold. Secondly, this preface sets the tone for the whole memoir, which makes this first part important, as it prepares the reader for what will come.

Right after the preface, Krakauer has placed a section labeled 'Dramatis Personæ', which general definition is a list of the characters in a drama. The people listed in Krakauer's dramatis personae are all characters performing in the great drama on Mount Everest in May 1996 (Krakauer *Air* XVII-XXII). Some are minor characters, some are major characters, some of them are heroes, and some are villains. This list acts as a way of referencing all of the characters, but it also serves as a technique in creative non-fiction to showcase how many people literally were on the mountain. Therefore, placing the list at the beginning showcases how polluted the wilderness trope is on the mountain. After this list of characters, the epigraph is placed, which generally is a short quotation at the start of a book suggesting its theme and setting the tone for the coming, which is also the case in this memoir. This epigraph also situates the book in a larger context and refers to many cultural, political, and environmental problems (Krakauer *Air* 1).

Analyzing the central part, it becomes clear that chapters one and two are separate from it. Chapter one functions as a flash-forward since it places the reader in the middle of the story, revealing what is about to happen at the most crucial point of the book (Krakauer *Air* 5-9). Chapter two functions as a prologue since this chapter is separate from the introduction and the main story since Krakauer has dedicated this whole chapter to the history of Mount Everest, which began in Dehradun in India in 1852 (Krakauer *Air* 13-26). The prologue provides information about the history of the mountain, but Krakauer also writes about his upbringing in America in this chapter (Krakauer *Air* 20). The chapter ends with Krakauer receiving a call letting him know he could go to Mount Everest if writing an article simultaneously (Krakauer *Air* 24-26).

The central part begins in chapter three, where the wilderness trope unfolds, and Krakauer begins to transform the trope. These chapters all have in common that Krakauer begins each chapter with a picture, a headline, and a quote, which sets the tone for the coming chapter. Krakauer has included a headline that provides information about the location, the date, and the elevation, which provides even

more information about what to expect in the chapter. In each chapter, Krakauer includes a quote; for example, the first one is by Eric Shipton from 1938 and reads:

> It would seem almost as though there were a cordon drawn round the upper part of these great peaks beyond which no man may go. The truth of course lies in the fact that, at altitudes of 25,000 feet and beyond, the effects of low atmospheric pressure upon the human body are so severe that really difficult mountaineering is impossible and the consequences even of a mild storm may be deadly, that nothing but the most perfect conditions of weather and snow offers the slightest chance of success [...] No, it is not remarkable that Everest did not yield to the first few attempts (Krakauer *Air* 5).

This quote serves as an insight into what the theme of the chapter will revolve around, how climbing these extremely high mountains is impossible, and there is the 'slightest chance of success', also indicating that the chapter will account for the first failed attempts of climbing Mount Everest. This quote also portrays climbing mountains the size of Mount Everest as entering a death zone, which is seen in how he writes that 'there were a cordon drawn round the upper part of these great peaks'. This part from the quote illustrates a picture of a line or an enclosure of the top of the mountain where immense and deathly risks are - mountains of altitudes of 25 thousand feet and beyond are a place 'which no man may go', Shipton writes (Krakauer *Air* 5). Hence, starting each chapter of his memoir with a quote is a way of either providing information about what is to come or information about the theme of the chapter, which creates a more meaningful understanding of the events that occur in the chapter. Additionally, this quote also relates to the title, *Into Thin Air*, which is one of the most significant literary elements that affect the reader, as it captures the reader's attention, sets the tone, and indicates what the story will be about. The title refers to being in a dangerous high-altitude place with little oxygen: being in 'thin air' (Krakauer *Air*).

Another key aspect of the memoir's structure is Krakauer's choice of placing 18 pictures in the middle, revealing the disaster's outcome. The pictures range from portraying the expedition team pre-disaster and stunning pictures of the mountain to pictures revealing who survived the disaster (Krakauer *Air* 152-153). These pictures and their placement imply that the reader already knows the ending of the memoir; otherwise, they would be placed in the end. Beck Weathers, who was given up for dead twice,

is seen in the last pictures assisted into a helicopter looking good given the circumstances (Krakauer *Air* 152-153). The decision to place the pictures in the middle, compared to placing them in the end, can also suggest other things. Firstly, the placement breaks up the book, which keeps the reader engaged since there is a slight interruption in the narrative. Secondly, the pictures serve as a way of introducing the book's main characters and putting a face on their names. Near each picture is a tiny textbox containing names and other important information. Overall, Krakauer's decision to place the pictures in the middle rather than in the end enhances the implied reader's reading experience. Including real pictures overall also speaks to the reader's empathy, as the reader can relate more to the narrative because of those. Even though the memoir is non-fiction, Krakauer is able to convey factual information and still affect his readers on an emotional level, which Keen also emphasizes. Including real pictures in the middle of the book facilitates the story even more, and this choice helps create a more profound interest and engagement.

Lastly, the memoir ends with an epilogue, a postscript, and an author's note, which takes place back in America. The epilogue takes place in Seattle on November 29th, 1996, a half year after the disaster on Mount Everest. The postscript regards Krakauer's reflections years after the disaster (Krakauer *Air* 289-315). Lastly, in the author's note, He writes, "I believe quite strongly that this story needed to be told. Obviously, not everyone feels this way, and I apologize to those who feel wounded by my words." (Krakauer *Air* 316). The author's note serves to thank those who accompanied him on the mountain. However, it also serves as a tribute to the diseased climber's family, friends, and people who felt wounded, which he sincerely regretted (Krakauer *Air* 316). This illumining of the memoir's structure demonstrates how Krakauer's memoir exemplifies the home-away-home structure; as he begins his story in the home world receiving the offer to climb Mount Everest, he then leaves to climb it, and the story ends back home in Seattle, America. This notion makes it clear how the wilderness trope is the most dominating theme, as the central part only takes place and revolves around the trope.

In summary, Krakauer's specific way of structuring the memoir includes creative non-fiction elements to capture the reader's interest and communicate his notions in this non-fiction memoir. Analyzing the structure and these techniques demonstrate that the reader's mind is already being prepped about what the book or coming chapter will entail. These elements illustrate how Krakauer intends to provide information and context or establish the book's theme and chapters, making the stories more meaningful, which affects the reader. The structure of *Into Thin Air* is an essential aspect to analyze since

it reveals how Krakauer has created a complex structure that reveals how the wilderness trope is the central theme throughout.

5.3.2. The wilderness trope

The wilderness trope is introduced both in the epigraph, in the prologue, and at the beginning of the central part as well. The first pages of the central part take place in an airplane from Bangkok to Kathmandu, where Krakauer first sees the mountain (Krakauer *Air* 29). The main central part begins in medias res, as it plunges the reader right into the middle of the plot. Beginning the central part inside a plane illustrates that the airplane becomes the liminal space connecting the home world and the away world. A liminal space in literature is the space between two different places, one in which Krakauer moves toward the away world in the Himalayas and back to the home world in America. From inside the plane, Krakauer goes on to describe his initial views of seeing Mount Everest for the first time;

> The ink-black wedge of the summit pyramid stood out in stark relief, towering over the surrounding ridges. Thrust high into the jetstream, the mountain ripped a visible gash in the 120-knot hurricane, sending forth a plume of ice crystals that trailed to the east like a long silk scarf [...] it occurred to me that the top of Everest was precisely the same height as the pressurized jet bearing me through the heavens. That I proposed to climb to the cruising altitude of an Airbus 300 jetliner struck me, at that moment, as preposterous, or worse (Krakauer *Air* 30).

This quote demonstrates Krakauer's initial view of the mountain and shows what Krakauer thinks of as wilderness and how he makes that computable for the implied reader. It speaks to an implied reader who is familiar with the idea of wilderness, and in this first quote, the reader begins to see some reformulation of moving beyond wilderness. The implied reader of the memoir is not a specific person; however, the implied reader is someone interested in nature, climbing, mountaineering, hiking, and all the activities and aspects that follow. Krakauer does not romanticize the mountain in this quote; he describes it as 'ink-black, associated with death and mourning. He uses the verbs 'towering', 'thrust', and 'ripped' to describe that the mountain is not passive but capable of doing stuff aggressively. In that way, Krakauer portrays the mountain as a violent place. However, it becomes multifaceted because he is in awe of its

natural beauty, in the sense that the mountain is 'sending forth a plume of ice crystals that trailed to the east like a long silk scarf'. Associating the mountain with death and violence, and in the same way, comparing it with a silk scarf, creates a contrast. It also creates an idea of wilderness that draws on traditional notions such as beauty and awe, as suggested by Muir. Another vital notion this quote illustrates is Krakauer's first impression of the mountain from an airplane, which enhances the understanding of the size of the mountain. The choice of not simply writing that he proposed to climb to 29 thousand feet; instead, he 'proposed to climb to the cruising altitude of an Airbus 300 jetliner'. Krakauer chooses to make this comparison to appeal to the average reader, as 29 thousand feet is simply unimaginable. In contrast, the average reader can understand how big the mountain is when comparing it with flying in an airplane, as this is a more familiar thing than climbing mountains.

Krakauer illustrates the wilderness trope in *Into Thin Air* by focusing on the mountain's immense beauty and comparing it with death. This contrast between experiencing the mountain as both terrifying and beautiful particularly also comes to show in this quote;

> The glacier's continual and often violent state of flux added an element of uncertainty to every ladder crossing. [...] But if the Icefall was strenuous and terrifying, it had a surprising allure as well. As dawn washed the darkness from the sky, the shattered glacier was revealed to be a three-dimensional landscape of phantasmal beauty (Krakauer *Air* 79).

This quote primarily illustrates how Krakauer views the mountain as a place of beauty and danger, which denotes that he portrays a complex wilderness trope that correlates with the quote above it. Both are examples of how Krakauer moves beyond traditional wilderness values, as he sees both the beautiful and terrifying aspects. This notion is evident as he describes the glacier as unpredictable, where one wrong step could lead to death, while also describing it as having a 'surprising allure'. This surprising allure means that the glacier also appears appealing and beautiful in an unexpected way. In the quote, Krakauer also describes the glacier as having 'phantasmal beauty' and that 'dawn washed the darkness from the sky', which are descriptions that sound like a poem, and denote several things. Firstly, Krakauer's narrative enhances the reader's understanding of the wilderness trope he depicts, as he beautifully writes a narrative that leaves the reader breathless, as Merino, Trombold, and Garner also emphasize.

Regarding his overall experience climbing Mount Everest, he writes, "The ratio of misery to pleasure was greater by an order of magnitude than any other mountain I'd been on" (Krakauer *Air* 136). An adventure into the wilderness is supposed to help people grow and become better persons, according to Muir, not be a miserable experience. Nevertheless, Krakauer acknowledges that the experience of climbing Mount Everest was more miserable than good, which proves that he moves beyond traditional values in the wilderness model.

5.3.3. Beyond wilderness

As established above, it becomes clear that Krakauer pushes beyond wilderness in how he describes his feelings and initial views of the mountain and associates the trope with death. Death is the ultimate failure to return, and this notion perverts everything because death and dehumanization are strong contrasts to the traditional wilderness trope, as the traditional wilderness trope is very humanizing. In *Into Thin Air,* it is as if the more people who die, the more value for the individual if he or she returns. These deaths raise the stakes, and the higher the stakes, the higher the experience of return, which comes to show in this quote:

> The first body had left me badly shaken for hours; the shock of encountering the second wore off almost immediately. Few of the climbers trudging by had given either corpse more than a passing glance. It was as if there were an unspoken agreement on the mountain to pretend that these desiccated remains weren't real – as if none of us dared to acknowledge what was at stake here (Krakauer *Air* 107).

Overall, the quote portrays wilderness as a highly horrifying and dehumanizing place where death is expected, as seen in how Krakauer entails a dehumanizing view of the dead people lying on the path to the summit. All of these dead people become litter on the mountain because removing them is too dangerous and expensive, which shows how the beauty and pureness of traditional wilderness are not present in this piece of wilderness, in the same way, suggested by Muir. Moreover, there is a high level of risk, which makes the pattern of return and retreat more valuable, which is clearly a perversion of the notion of traditional wilderness. Muir argues that according to traditional values, you go into the

wilderness, be authentic, and return without getting killed. In this sense, Krakauer critiques the idea that all these deaths pervert this logic; the deaths distort traditional values.

Furthermore, the quote also illustrates that Krakauer experiences shock and awe on the mountain; however, these dead bodies that generate the shock turns people into lesser humans. This idea of wilderness is not one that Krakauer wants to maintain; he wants to be shocked and left in awe of its immense beauty and grandeur, as proposed by Muir and Adams. Lastly, Krakauer states that there "... were an unspoken agreement [...] to pretend that these desiccated remains weren't real – as if none of us dared to acknowledge what was at stake here" (Krakauer *Air* 107). Here, Krakauer critiques the climbers because they refuse to see the reality of the risk of climbing Mount Everest. They live in a pretense or denial of the reality of the mountain and are driven by the myth of the wilderness trope, which is the same case with McCandless (Krakauer *Wild* 164). Garrard issues this as a problem, as it is crucial to distinguish between knowing that culture creates nature and that nature is an actual physical piece of land as well.

In *Into Thin Air*, Krakauer uses the wilderness trope to show the dangers and unpredictable aspects of climbing Mount Everest. Therefore, the wilderness trope functions as the antagonist, as it is a combination of the mountain, the people, and what the trope does to the people. The mountain did not kill the eight climbers, but the wilderness trope played a significant role in the deaths. "In fact, the gale of May 10, though violent, was nothing extraordinary; it was a fairly typical Everest squall" (Krakauer *Air* 272). Krakauer portrays the mountain as a violent place where storms are typical and nothing extraordinary. This portrayal of the mountain adds to the understanding of the wilderness trope by highlighting that this trope is a constantly unpredictable place. Not only did eight climbers die on Mount Everest on the day that Krakauer summited the mountain, but everything about this particular trope tries to prohibit people from summiting, which is why the wilderness trope arguably is seen as the antagonist. Some risks of entering this wilderness, the 'death zone' as Krakauer calls it, are hypothermia, frostbite, avalanches, crevasses, extreme and unpredictable weather, altitude sickness, and death (Krakauer *Air* 173). These risks mean something more significant than their literal meaning; they are symbols or warnings; it is as if the extremeness of the wilderness trope is trying to tell people that they do not belong there.

> ”Every minute you remain at this altitude and above,” he cautioned, “your minds and bodies are deteriorating.” Brain cells were dying. Our blood was growing dangerously thick [...] Even at rest, our hearts beat at a furious rate (Krakauer *Air* 154-155).

This quote shows how the human body begins to die at this altitude, consuming itself, indicating that humans do not belong in this remote piece of nature. Nature's many life-threatening risks warn us of how extreme and dangerous this remote wilderness is, and there will be harmful consequences when disturbing it. The climbers even recognize this themselves, for example, when two large rocks hit a sherpa and "... knocked him unconscious, and sent him into cardiopulmonary arrest [...] 'What's going on here? What have we done to make this mountain so angry?'" (Krakauer *Air* 250). This quote demonstrates two key notions; firstly, the mountain is an example of anthropomorphism as containing human characteristics. Secondly, it is clear how the mountain functions as the antagonist, acting as the opponent that challenges and tries to stop the characters' journey toward summiting Mount Everest. Even though the wilderness trope is the most responsible factor in the deaths, several people also played a role in their deaths. Rob Hall, the expedition leader, made several decisions that also contributed to killing the people since he, as the leader, should have made more responsible choices on the mountain. There were many reasons why the climbers died, and a myriad of natural aspects resulted in the disaster, which contributes to demonstrating that *Into Thin Air* moves beyond, as these antagonistic resistances are opposite to the traditional wilderness trope values Krakauer wants to maintain.

5.3.4. Krakauer's powerful and highly personal narrative

The wilderness trope is the central theme in the memoir; however, the powerful and highly personal narrative is also crucial as it affects the reader. Therefore, by analyzing Krakauer's narrative representation in correlation with the wilderness trope, it illustrates how the narrative shapes the reader's understanding of the wilderness trope. It is not simply the representation of the wilderness trope; the narrative form gives it power and significance. In correlation with the above analysis of the place being dehumanizing, an example of how Krakauer's narrative affects the reader is shown in this quote, where he includes the story of two Japanese climbers who selfishly left people to die to reach the summit themselves. This quote takes place on the other side of the mountain:

> ... one of the Ladakhis was “apparently close to death, the other crouching in the snow. No words were passed. Nowater, food or oxygen exchanged hands [...] “We didn’t know them. No, we didn’t give them any water. We didn’t talk to them. They had severe high-altitude sickness. They looked as if they were dangerous. ”Shigekawa explained, “We were too tired to help. Above 8,000 meters is not a place where people can afford morality. (Krakauer *Air* 241)

This quote reveals how the two Japanese climbers decided not to help two other dying climbers in favor of reaching the summit. They needed water and oxygen to keep climbing, and the others died due to the Japanese actions. This quote shows that the Japanese climbers are contributing to dehumanizing this trope, which Krakauer disagrees with as he would like to retain the humanizing traditional aspect. However, the quote illustrates that the Japanese’s actions humanize the other characters on the mountain, as the Japanese’s actions greatly contrast those climbers, who show the opposite of egocentrism. For example, the climber Boukreev kept going out in the storm trying to rescue people, even though it meant sacrificing his own life over others (Krakauer Air 213). Boukreev is an example of someone who shows acts of self-sacrifice and heroism on the mountain. This notion plays into the idea of traditional wilderness, where people embark into the wilderness to become better human beings, as proposed by Muir, and this is a value Krakauer wants to maintain. However, as Krakauer acknowledges, these inhumane and horrifying terms on the mountain are inevitable, and he does recognize death as an opportunity in this wilderness. These aspects clash with traditional wilderness values, which proves how *Into Thin Air* moves beyond wilderness in the wilderness model.

Another way in which Krakauer’s personal storytelling technique comes to show is in the way he includes background information about the other climbers, which are integrated parts of his narrative. This information creates a deeper and more personal bond with the characters, which affects the story’s validity, according to Bignold, and speaks to the reader’s empathy, according to Keen and Morgan. The background information is either a small paragraph or sentence necessary to understand essential parts of the story on Mount Everest fully. For example, when Krakauer explains the situation with Beck Weathers:

> ”Beck!” I exclaimed, “what the fuck are you still doing up there?”. Years earlier, Beck had undergone a radial keratotomy* to correct his vision. A side effect of the surgery, he discovered early in the Everest climb, was that the low barometric pressure that exists at high altitude caused his eyesight to fail. The higher he climbed, the lower barometric pressure fell, and the worse his vision became (Krakauer *Air* 189).

This quote denotes several things; firstly, it exemplifies how Krakauer integrates background information about Weathers in his narrative to create a more meaningful reading experience, which also affects the reader's feeling of empathy. Here, the reader learns vital information and history about the other climbers. Secondly, this quote exemplifies how Krakauer uses dialogue in his memoir to recreate actual conversations, creating a feeling of realism. This way of including dialogue in a story is typically found in fiction pieces, which is yet another example of how Krakauer uses characteristics of fiction when writing, trying to evoke feelings within the reader. Thirdly, Krakauer uses symbolism when he writes that when Beck climbed higher, 'the worse his vision became'. This symbol is a literary technique he uses to combine the literary with the factual. Lastly, this quote illustrates how Krakauer uses much scientific information and terms, as seen in how he includes many footnotes in the memoir. For example, in the quote above, a footnote is linked to 'a radial keratotomy*' to give the reader information about that procedure (Krakauer *Air* 189), as the implied reader is unfamiliar with such terms. Including footnotes is a non-fictional technique that does not disturb the narrative flow, and it also allows Krakauer to be taken seriously as a writer, which correlates with Heyne, who emphasizes that the author's factual status is essential in non-fiction.

5.3.5. Environmental ethics and the commercialization of climbing

Another key aspect of the wilderness trope that contributes to proving that Krakauer moves beyond the traditional wilderness is environmental ethics, which explores the issues that arise when humans interfere with the natural world and examines how humans should behave, treat and protect the natural world. This aspect is essential to analyze in correlation with the wilderness trope in *Into Thin Air*, as it illustrates the relationship between individuals' ambitions and their impact on the environment on Mount Everest. Krakauer portrays this as a problem in his book, as he describes his wilderness as overcrowded and filled with people, which he describes as traffic jams where people often wait in line for other people

(Krakauer *Air* 176). "At 21,300 feet, Camp Two consisted of some 120 tents scattered across the bare rocks of the lateral moraine along the glacier's edge" (Krakauer *Air* 107). This quote portrays the image of 120 tents spread across the mountain's 'bare rocks', which illustrates the scale of how many people were there. This image and notion of traffic jams correlate with environmental ethics, as it raises questions about how much humans disturb the ecosystem and wilderness on Mount Everest.

In the prologue, Krakauer writes that when people first discovered the mountain in 1852, the mountain became the next new popular pure natural place to explore. "Once Everest was determined to be the highest summit on earth, it was only a matter of time before people decided that Everest needed to be climbed" (Krakauer *Air* 14). At the same time, Krakauer acknowledges how it is inevitable that people will explore every piece of the world, which correlates with DeLancey's new concept of wilderness. DeLancey states that traditional values are no longer applicable today because humans have been everywhere, even on the moon; therefore, the focus must be shifted toward the state of the ecosystem inside these wildernesses. This notion is an aspect Krakauer values, which is seen in his attitude towards trash; for example, when he states: "Wanting to remove all my trash from the mountain, I stuffed it into my pack with my other two bottles" (Krakauer *Air* 191). However, not everyone has the same attitude, respect, and desire to preserve the natural land.

> I had heard many stories about how Everest had been turned into a garbage dump by the ever-increasing hordes, and commercial expeditions were reputed to be the primary culprits. Although in the 1970s and '80s Base Camp was indeed a big rubbish heap, in recent years it had been turned into a fairly tidy place (Krakauer *Air* 60).

This quote demonstrates how commercialization has affected the environment on Mount Everest, which Krakauer describes as being a garbage dump, and the expeditions were the ones that are held responsible. As the quote shows, garbage and trash have been reduced in recent years. In recent years, which are the 1990s that Krakauer refers to, there was a more significant focus on cleaning up. In 1990 Rob Hall and Gary Ball initiated and executed a clean-up from Base Camp, where they removed five tons of garbage. Compared to the climbers, who were one-time visitors, Hall and Ball worked in this garbage-filled place every day. After the clean-up, Hall and some other guides cooperated with the government ministries in Kathmandu, where they created strategies to keep the mountain clean. In 1996, there was a requirement

that the expedition must pay an extra 4,000 dollars, which would be refunded if they took their trash back down (Krakauer *Air* 60). This notion illustrates how the guides recognized the need for maintaining and preserving the natural land, where it is inevitable to exclude people, which correlates with DeLancey's new concept of wilderness.

Regarding this issue with climbers' environmental impact on the natural land, Krakauer is often shocked by how the wilderness on Mount Everest is polluted and filled with trash and dead people. Humans have degraded the once pure and untouched environment, which Krakauer acknowledges as a problem. Therefore, Krakauer proposes an idea that would prohibit climbers from climbing Mount Everest:

> Perhaps the simplest way to reduce future carnage would be to ban bottled oxygen except for emergency medical use. A few reckless souls might perish trying to reach the summit without gas, but the great bulk of marginally competent climbers would be forced to turn back by their own physical limitations before they ascended high enough to get into serious trouble. And a no-gas regulation would have the corollary benefit of automatically reducing trash and crowding because considerably fewer people would attempt Everest if they knew supplemental oxygen was not an option (Krakauer *Air* 273-274).

This quote overall illustrates Krakauer's view of the commercialization of the mountain and how it is a big issue as the climbers pollute and destroy the environment on Mount Everest. In this quote, Krakauer suggests that bottled oxygen should be banned, as it would prohibit many climbers from trying to summit. This proposal would protect the environment on the mountain as fewer climbers would ascend, and it would be 'automatically reducing trash and crowding'. This proposal would result in less pollution from humans, as many climbers could not climb due to 'their own physical limitations'.

Krakauer raises the critique that too many people on the mountain do not belong there, which is something the expedition leader acknowledges as well; "With so many incompetent people on the mountain [...] I think it's pretty unlikely that we'll get through this season without something bad happening up high" (Krakauer *Air* 100). This quote illustrates that it is not just Krakauer who issues this problem; others recognize it too. All these 'incompetent people', Hall refers to, need assistance from

bottled oxygen, team leaders, and Sherpas as well. The role of Sherpas is another issue Krakauer points out:

> Sherpas put in the route, set up the camps, did the cooking, hauled all the loads. This conserved our energy and vastly increased our chances of getting up Everest, but I found it hugely unsatisfying. I felt at times as if I wasn't really climbing the mountain—that surrogates were doing it for me. (Krakauer *Air* 168).

This quote demonstrates how big of a role Sherpas play when summiting the mountain. Krakauer highlights how Sherpas set up camps, cook, and carry all the climbers' loads so they can climb and focus on the summit. Krakauer states that receiving help from Sherpas was 'hugely unsatisfying' and that he felt like a surrogate did it. If Sherpas did not help, and bottled oxygen was not an option, the majority of the climbers would not be able to summit the mountain. Not only does this fact prove that people do not belong there, but it also demonstrates that there is no authenticity left in the way climbers climb. Shockingly, a third of all the deaths on the mountain are Sherpas (Lama), which illustrates that the climbers also risk the lives of the Sherpas. This notion makes the trope even more dehumanizing, which once again illustrates how Krakauer moves beyond traditional values.

All things considered, analyzing the aspect of environmental ethics in *Into Thin Air* illustrates how Krakauer critiques the state of Mount Everest, as it stands in stark contrast to traditional wilderness trope values, as suggested by Muir. "It was a magnificent country, as topographically imposing as any landscape on earth, but it wasn't wilderness, and hadn't been for hundreds of years" (Krakauer *Air* 42). This quote illustrates how Krakauer acknowledges that the wilderness on Mount Everest has changed, which calls for a new understanding of the wilderness trope, for example, as suggested by DeLancey. This notion correlates with the analysis of *Into the Wild*, as the two both portray a wilderness trope that is a trope without reality. Krakauer critiques how people misinterpret the trope, as they cannot see the difference between reality and myth, which is also the case with McCandless. People want to climb Mount Everest and go into the wilderness, but it is, in fact, not wilderness and 'hadn't been for hundreds of years'. In an interview 18 years after *Into Thin Air* was published, Krakauer states that Mount Everest is not real climbing; it is rich people climbing who only want a trophy on their wall. He states that his

experience is not a point of pride for him; it is a regret, and he wishes he would never have gone (Kaufman).

Summary of the analysis of *Into Thin Air*

In summary, Krakauer's personal account of the disaster on Mount Everest chronicles the factors and choices that caused eight climbers to die. The book's overall theme is the wilderness trope that Krakauer portrays as multifaceted, which sets the tone. The wilderness trope is present in every part of the book, which comes to show in the analysis of the complex structure. Here, Krakauer uses creative non-fiction techniques to make his story come to life and capture the reader's interest. Additionally, the powerful and personal narrative is crucial in the analysis, as it adds a deeper and more meaningful understanding of the representation of the trope.

Krakauer portrays the wilderness trope in *Into Thin Air* as one he associates with natural beauty but also death and aggressiveness, which creates a contrast. He depicts the trope as a dehumanizing place where death is common, illustrating the idea on the mountain: the more people who die, the more value for the individual when returning. However, he critiques this notion as it is a perversion of the notion of traditional wilderness, as advocated by Muir, who sees the authenticity of returning and not dying in the wilderness. Another aspect of the book that illustrates how *Into Thin Air* pushes beyond traditional values is the environmental aspect. Here, Krakauer issues concerns regarding the commercialization of the mountain; Mount Everest is filled with people, tents, dead people, and trash: it is not wilderness and has not been for many years. Krakauer also critiques the idea of distinguishing between myth and reality, as the climbers live in pretense because they are driven by the myth of the wilderness trope.

All these aspects in the analysis prove that *Into Thin Air* moves beyond the wilderness trope, as he presents a complex wilderness trope that is beautiful and grandeur but also dehumanizing and turns people into lesser human beings. This notion proves that Krakauer includes elements of both branches in the wilderness model, as he values the traditional wilderness trope but cannot avoid the dehumanizing stakes and conditions; therefore, he moves beyond.

6. Conclusion

This master's thesis aimed at investigating how Krakauer portrays the wilderness trope, as he respectively challenges traditional wilderness values differently in each book, all in order to answer the thesis statement:

> In *Eiger Dreams*, *Into the Wild*, and *Into Thin Air*, Jon Krakauer systematically examines, challenges, and pushes beyond the wilderness trope as it is traditionally known in the US.

Eiger Dreams is a collection of pieces in which Krakauer systematically tires different interpretations of the wilderness trope. In every piece, except the last, he challenges traditional values, as suggested by Muir and Adams. The way he describes the wilderness trope with both being beautiful but also associating it with death proves that he moves beyond. Even though the dehumanizing aspect is inevitable in his portrayal of the trope, Krakauer still tries to retain traditional values, which comes to show in the last piece of the book. Here, he illustrates that the traditional trope continues and calls for an interpretation that the risk-filled and dehumanizing trope is wrong. Therefore, Krakauer depicts a complex wilderness trope in *Eiger Dreams*, as he values aspects of the traditional wilderness trope but acknowledges that unavoidable factors such as commercialization and death disturb this, which proves that he moves beyond.

In *Into the Wild*, Krakauer also depicts a complex and nuanced wilderness trope that draws on traditional values but overall moves beyond. This notion is seen as McCandless escapes society to live a more pure and pristine life in the Alaskan wilderness. However, Krakauer critiques his way of living, which comes to show in McCandless' unpreparedness, and how he mistreats and misinterprets the wilderness, which all illustrates that he lives in a pretense. Krakauer includes his own story to enhance how McCandless misinterpreted the wilderness trope and to showcase that McCandless lived in the myth of the trope. Therefore, the wilderness trope in *Into the Wild* becomes one without reflection and reality, which proves that it moves beyond traditional values.

In *Into Thin Air*, Krakauer depicts the wilderness trope as complex and multifaceted, associating it with natural beauty and death. Krakauer critiques the idea that returning has a higher value due to the common fatal risks on the mountain, as it is a perversion of traditional wilderness values, as suggested

by Muir, who values the authenticity of returning. Commercialization has become an issue, as trash and dead people fill the mountain, which Krakauer emphasizes is a problem as it contrasts traditional values. The wilderness on the mountain has not been a wilderness for many years; it is one where climbers are driven too much by the myth of the trope and live in pretense. Overall, this analysis of *Into Thin Air* proves that Krakauer presents a complex wilderness trope, as he tries to maintain the humanizing aspect but still acknowledges that fatal risks and dehumanizing stakes are inevitable, which proves that *Into Thin Air* moves beyond.

The three books are critiques of the traditional wilderness trope, where Krakauer moves beyond differently in each book. He systematically explores different interpretations of the trope in *Eiger Dreams* but immensely critiques and challenges the trope in *Into the Wild* and *Into Thin Air* - especially in *Into Thin Air*, as the trope within becomes a perversion of traditional values. In correlation with the wilderness model, Krakauer is placed beyond the two branches; he pushes beyond. Therefore, to conclude and answer the thesis statement: this ecocritical analysis and discussion proves that the books differ in their subject matter and approach, but they have in common that Krakauer systematically challenges the wilderness trope as it is traditionally known in the US in each book.

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