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THE DISCOURSE OF ECOLOGICAL NICHE IN JON KRAKAUER'S *INTO THE WILD*

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Abstract. This study investigates the discourse of ecological niche presented in Jon Krakauer's *Into the Wild* through a Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) approach. The objectives of this study are to identify the theme of the novel and to examine the ecological niche depicted through the relationship between the main character and the natural environment. This study employs a descriptive qualitative design combining ecocriticism, Critical Discourse Analysis, and Plotkin's *Wild Mind* theory. Critical Discourse Analysis (following Fairclough's three-dimensional model) serves as the principal framework for examining linguistic and discursive features, ecocriticism interprets the representation of nature, and Wild Mind theory illuminates the protagonist's psychological relationship with the environment. The primary data source is Jon Krakauer's *Into the Wild* (1997), while supporting sources are obtained from books and journal articles related to discourse analysis and ecological studies. Data were collected through close reading and documentation techniques and analyzed thematically using discourse interpretation. The findings reveal that the central theme of the novel is the search for authentic freedom and self-identity through separation from materialistic civilization. Furthermore, the ecological niche represented in the novel portrays Christopher Johnson McCandless as an individual attempts to redefine his position within nature by rejecting modern social values and seeking harmony with the wilderness. However, the study also shows that the romanticism of nature and inadequate ecological adaptation create tensions between idealism and environmental reality. Therefore, *Into the Wild* presents ecological niche not merely as a biological concept but as a discursive representation of human identity, ideology, and the relationship between nature and modern civilization.

Abstrak. Penelitian ini mengkaji tentang wacana ceruk ekologis yang dipresentasikan dalam karya Jon Krakauer *Into the Wild*, melalui pendekatan Analisis Wacana Kritis (AWK). Tujuan penelitian ini adalah untuk mengidentifikasi tema novel tersebut serta menelaah ceruk ekologis yang digambarkan melalui hubungan antara tokoh utama dan lingkungan alam. Penelitian ini menggunakan desain kualitatif deskriptif yang memadukan ekokritik, Analisis Wacana Kritis, dan teori *Wild Mind* karya Plotkin. Dengan Analisis Wacana Kritis (mengikuti model tiga dimensi Fairclough) sebagai kerangka utama untuk mengkaji fitur linguistik dan diskursif, ekokritik untuk menafsirkan representasi alam, dan teori Wild Mind untuk menjelaskan dimensi psikologis hubungan tokoh utama dengan lingkungan. Sumber data utama adalah novel *Into the Wild* (1997) karya Jon Krakauer, sedangkan sumber pendukung diperoleh dari buku dan artikel jurnal yang berkaitan dengan analisis wacana dan studi ekologis. Data dikumpulkan melalui teknik pembacaan saksama dan dokumentasi, kemudian dianalisis secara tematis menggunakan interpretasi wacana. Temuan penelitian menunjukkan bahwa tema sentral novel ini adalah pencarian kebebasan autentik dan identitas diri melalui pemisahan diri dari peradaban materialistis. Lebih lanjut, ceruk ekologis yang dipresentasikan dalam novel menggambarkan Christopher Johnson McCandless sebagai individu yang berupaya mendefinisikan ulang posisinya di alam dengan cara menolak nilai-nilai sosial modern dan mencari harmoni dengan alam liar. Namun, penelitian ini juga menunjukkan bahwa romantisisme terhadap alam dan adaptasi ekologis yang tidak memadai menciptakan ketegangan antara idealisme dan realitas lingkungan. Dengan demikian, *Into the Wild* menyajikan ceruk ekologis bukan sekadar sebagai konsep biologis, melainkan sebagai representasi diskursif mengenai identitas manusia, ideologi, serta hubungan antara alam dan peradaban modern.

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INTRODUCTION

Language is a fundamental element of human interaction where meanings, beliefs, and ideologies are constructed and negotiated. Meanings in literary works are produced through language, and discourse analysis. They provide important framework for examining how meanings are constructed. According to Renkema (2004), discourse analysis investigates language beyond the sentence level and focuses on how meaning is created through relationships among textual elements and social contexts. In literary studies, discourse analysis enables researchers to explore how narrative structures, descriptions, and lexical choices contribute to the formation of meaning, revealing that literary texts function not merely as aesthetic products but also as ideological constructs that reflect and challenge social values.

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) extends this perspective by conceptualizing language as a social practice closely related to ideology, identity, and power relations. This study adopts Fairclough's (1995) three-dimensional model as its principal analytical framework, which examines discourse simultaneously as *text* (vocabulary, grammar, and textual structure), *discursive practice* (the processes of production and interpretation of the text), and *social practice* (the wider ideological and hegemonic conditions within which the discourse is situated). Van Dijk's (2008) socio-cognitive perspective on ideology and Gee's (2014) categories for analyzing identity and Discourse are drawn upon in a supporting capacity to enrich the interpretation of specific textual features, without displacing Fairclough's model as the principal framework guiding the analysis. Through this lens, *Into the Wild* can be understood not only as a narrative of adventure but as a discursive construct that reflects and challenges dominant ideologies concerning nature, freedom, and civilization.

Recent developments in discourse studies indicate that critical discourse analysis has increasingly expanded beyond ideology, power, and social inequality toward ecological concern. Song et al. (2025), through a systematic review of Ecological Discourse Analysis (EDA) studies published between 2014 and 2023, demonstrate that contemporary discourse analysis increasingly investigates how language constructs ecological values, environmental ethics, and sustainable relationships between humans and nature, and that EDA has become an interdisciplinary framework integrating discourse studies, ecolinguistics, and environmental humanities. Parallel developments in ecocriticism show that literary studies now address a wider range of environmental concerns, including climate change, environmental justice, and human-nature interdependence. Usman & Anis (2026) highlight the contribution of environmental themes in contemporary fiction to readers' ecological consciousness, while Gach & Adugna (2024) demonstrate how literary discourse constructs ecological relationships through narrative representations of proximity and interdependence among ecological entities. These developments support the integration of Critical Discourse Analysis with ecocriticism as a pertinent framework for examining how ecological identities and environmental values are portrayed in literary discourse.

One literary work that presents complex interactions between humans and nature is Jon Krakauer's *Into the Wild* (1997), which narrates the life of Christopher Johnson McCandless, a young man who abandons his possessions, family expectations, and modern civilization to seek meaning and freedom in the Alaska wilderness. Previous studies have examined the novel from various perspectives: Crafton (2014) analyzes it through ecocriticism and demonstrates the tension between romantic idealism and ecological reality; Parajuli (2018) discusses anthropocentric attitudes toward nature and the objectification of the environment; and Manik (2015) focuses on the discourse of freedom, interpreting Alaska as a symbol of liberation from

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social constraints. Although valuable, these studies mainly emphasize thematic and philosophical interpretation and pay limited attention to how ecological meanings are constructed through language and discourse, nor do they engage with the concept of ecological niche.

The concept of ecological niche originates in ecology, where Hutchinson (1957) defines it as the position occupied by an organism within a multidimensional space of environmental conditions and resources that determines its survival and interaction with other organisms. Contemporary ecological scholarship has revised this originally static definition: Leibold & Frans (2021) argue that niche should be understood as a dynamic interaction between an organism and its environment, continuously reshaped by environmental conditions and biological processes, rather than as a fixed category. In this study, ecological niche is adapted from its biological origin into an interdisciplinary analytical construct for literary discourse: rather than referring to a physical or biological position, it denotes the discursively constructed *position and function* that a human subject occupies in relation to the natural environment, as represented through language.

This construct is distinguished from related but conceptually different terms. *Ecological identity* refers to an individual's self-conception as a being connected to nature, a matter of self-perception. *Environmental identity* refers more broadly to identification with environmentalist values or movements. *Anthropocentrism* denotes a human-centered worldview that positions human interests above those of the natural world. *Human-nature relationship* is a broad, non-positional category encompassing any form of interaction between humans and the environment. Ecological niche, by contrast, is used in this study specifically to denote the *relational position*, inclusion, exclusion, adaptation, or failure to adapt, that a character discursively occupies within an ecological system, making it a positional and dynamic construct rather than a purely psychological or philosophical one. This distinction operationalizes ecological niche as an analytical construct that can be traced through specific discursive indicators, detailed in the Research Methods section.

In addition to this ecological perspective, Plotkin (2013) offers a psychological framework for understanding the relationship between human identity and nature through the concept of *Wild Mind*, arguing that modern society alienates individuals from their authentic ecological selves. In the context of *Into the Wild*, Christopher McCandless's journey can be interpreted as an attempt to rediscover this "wild mind" and restore his relationship with nature, providing a complementary psychological dimension to the discursive and ecocritical analysis undertaken in this study.

Despite the growing number of studies on ecocriticism and environmental discourse, the integration of Critical Discourse Analysis, ecological niche, and *Wild Mind* theory remains underdeveloped. Bibliometric evidence supports this observation: Yadav & Sinha's (2024) bibliometric review of ecocriticism scholarship indicates a continuing expansion into themes such as the Anthropocene, material ecocriticism, and environmental justice, while Kamarullah & Yanti's (2024) bibliometric mapping of ecolinguistics and Critical Discourse Analysis shows that literary discourse represents only a small proportion of research combining these two fields. This indicates an opportunity for research examining ecological meanings constructed through literary narratives by combining discourse analysis with ecocritical perspectives. Based on this background, this study addresses two research questions. First, what is the theme of the novel *Into the Wild*? Second, what ecological niche is depicted in the novel through the relationship between the protagonist and the natural environment? Accordingly, this study aims to identify the central theme of the novel and to examine how ecological niche is discursively represented. Theoretically, the study contributes to ecocriticism by introducing ecological niche as a discourse-based analytical construct; practically, it is expected to provide insight into how literary texts construct ecological awareness through language.

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RESEARCH METHODS

Research Design

This study employed a descriptive qualitative research design based on literary discourse analysis. Qualitative research was considered appropriate because the study focused on interpreting meanings, ideologies, and representations embedded in textual data rather than measuring numerical variables. Within this design, three analytical resources were assigned distinct and complementary roles. Critical Discourse Analysis, based on Fairclough's (1995) three-dimensional model, functioned as the principal analytical procedure used to examine the linguistic and discursive construction of ecological meaning. Ecocriticism (Garrard, 2012) functioned as an interpretive lens for evaluating how nature is represented and endowed with agency within the narrative. Plotkin's (2013) *Wild Mind* theory functioned as a supplementary interpretive lens for illuminating the psychological and spiritual dimension of the protagonist's relationship with nature. This division of roles distinguishes the overall research design from the specific analytical procedures applied within it.

Data Source

The object of this study was Jon Krakauer's *Into the Wild* (1997 Anchor Books edition), selected because it presents complex interactions between humans and nature and portrays ideological conflicts concerning freedom, identity, materialism, and ecological consciousness. The primary data consisted of words, phrases, sentences, dialogues, narrations, and reflective passages contained in the novel. Because pagination differs across printings of this edition, direct quotations are cited by chapter rather than page number. Secondary data were obtained from books and journal articles concerning discourse analysis, ecocriticism, ecological niche theory, and *Wild Mind* theory.

Data Selection Procedure

Data selection followed explicit inclusion and exclusion criteria. Textual units were included if they explicitly represented one or more of the following: (a) the protagonist's rejection of or alienation from civilization and materialism, (b) his engagement with wilderness as a physical and symbolic ecological space, (c) his attempts at ecological adaptation and survival, or (d) reflective or intertextual statements concerning freedom, identity, and humanity's relationship with nature. Textual units were excluded if they consisted primarily of neutral biographical or geographical description with no discernible ideological or ecological significance, or if they involved secondary characters' dialogue unrelated to the protagonist's ecological positioning. Applying these criteria to the novel, the researchers identified and compiled the relevant textual units into a working corpus. Applying these criteria through repeated close reading of the entire novel, sixteen primary textual excerpts were identified as the most salient and representative instances of the four categories, distributed evenly across them (four excerpts per category); these excerpts, together with their chapter locations, are summarized in Table 1. This purposively selected set was then organized according to the five thematic categories described below.

Table 1. Coded Textual Excerpts of Ecological Niche Categories in Into the Wild (N = 16)

No	Category	Chapter	Textual Evidence / Coding Note
1	Human Alienation from Civilization	Twelve	McCandless donated the balance of his savings to OXFAM and severed contact with his family after graduation (evaluative act framing wealth negatively).
2	Human Alienation from Civilization	Seven	He accuses his parents' conduct of being "so irrational, so oppressive, disrespectful and insulting" (letter to his sister).
3	Human Alienation from Civilization	Six	He urges Ron Franz to reject a life "conditioned to a life of security, conformity, and conservatism."
4	Human Alienation from Civilization	Sixteen	The bus-wall declaration states he is "no longer to be poisoned by civilization" (see Results, Section 2a).

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5	Wilderness as an Ecological Space	Fourteen	His postcard to Westerberg declares, "I now walk into the wild."
6	Wilderness as an Ecological Space	Two	Krakauer describes the Stampede Trail as a "boggy amalgam of muskeg, alder thickets, and veins of scrawny spruce."
7	Wilderness as an Ecological Space	Sixteen	From a nearby butte he views "mile after mile of uninhabited country."
8	Wilderness as an Ecological Space	Sixteen	He marks his arrival at the bus in his journal as "Magic Bus Day," framing the site as a symbolic threshold into wilderness.
9	Ecological Adaptation and Survival	Sixteen	Before entering the bush he obtains a field guide to edible plants and a rifle in preparation for subsistence living.
10	Ecological Adaptation and Survival	Sixteen	He "became much more successful at hunting game," feasting on squirrel, grouse, duck, goose, and porcupine.
11	Ecological Adaptation and Survival	Sixteen	After failing to preserve a moose he had killed, he writes that it is "one of the greatest tragedies of my life."
12	Ecological Adaptation and Survival	Eighteen	He forages wild-potato (Hedysarum alpinum) roots and seeds identified using a local ethnobotanical field guide.
13	Ecological Failure and Tragic Consequences	Sixteen	He crosses the Teklanika River easily in April, unaware of its later seasonal danger (dramatic irony/foreshadowing).
14	Ecological Failure and Tragic Consequences	Sixteen	Trapped by the flooded river in July, his journal reads: "Disaster.....River look impossible. Lonely, scared."
15	Ecological Failure and Tragic Consequences	Eighteen	His deteriorating journal entry reads, "EXTREMLY WEAK...STARVING. GREAT JEOPARDY."
16	Ecological Failure and Tragic Consequences	Two	The autopsy found his remains "weighed sixty-seven pounds," with starvation posited as the probable cause of death.

Each excerpt in Table 1 was cross-checked against its chapter of origin in the 1997 Anchor Books edition to ensure verifiability; excerpts already quoted and analyzed in the Results section (Nos. 4, 14) are cross-referenced rather than repeated verbatim.

Instrument and Data Collection

The researcher functioned as the main research instrument, responsible for collecting, selecting, classifying, analyzing, and interpreting data. Note-taking sheets and data classification tables were employed to organize quotations and thematic categories. Data collection was conducted in three stages. First, the researcher repeatedly read the novel to develop a comprehensive understanding of its storyline and narrative structure. Second, textual units meeting the inclusion criteria above were identified and highlighted. Third, the selected excerpts were classified into five categories, discourse of freedom, ecological identity, wilderness, anti-materialism, and ecological niche, using a coding sheet in which each category was defined with reference to explicit criteria and illustrative examples.

Data Analysis Procedure

Data were analyzed following Fairclough's (1995) three-dimensional model. At the textual level, the analysis examined lexical choices, including naming and renaming strategies (e.g., the protagonist's adoption of the name "Alexander Supertramp"), transitivity patterns indicating agency between the human subject and natural entities, modality expressing certainty or aspiration, and evaluative language distinguishing civilization from wilderness. At the level of discursive practice, the analysis examined intertextuality, particularly the novel's engagement with the writings of Thoreau, Tolstoy, and London, and narrative framing, including the interplay between first-person journal entries and third-person narration. At the level of social practice, these textual and discursive patterns were interpreted in relation to broader ideologies of individualism, anti-materialism, and ecological consciousness circulating in contemporary discourse. These three levels of analysis were used to connect specific linguistic features to the construction of ideology, identity, power, and ecological representation. Discourse interpretation

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following Renkema's (2004) framework, ecocritical interpretation following Garrard (2012), and psychological interpretation following Plotkin (2013) were applied at the discursive and social practice levels to complement the CDA procedure.

Operationalization of Ecological Niche

To ensure that ecological niche was analyzed as a discrete and traceable discursive category rather than as a general theme, four types of textual indicator were used to identify its presence in the data. *Positional indicators* consist of lexis and narration marking the protagonist's inclusion in, or exclusion from, civilization and the natural environment. *Adaptive indicators* consist of lexis and narration describing skills, actions, and outcomes related to survival and environmental interaction. *Evaluative indicators* consist of appraisal language signaling harmony, tension, or conflict between the protagonist and his environment. *Ideological indicators* consist of intertextual references and reflective statements that frame the protagonist's philosophy of nature. These four indicators distinguish ecological niche, as operationalized in this study, from the broader and non-positional categories of ecological identity and human-nature relationship discussed in the Introduction.

Trustworthiness

Because the researcher functioned as the sole analyst, several procedures beyond repeated reading were employed to strengthen the credibility and transparency of the analysis. An explicit coding rubric was developed, defining each of the five thematic categories with reference to the operational indicators described above and illustrated with example excerpts. Analytical memos were maintained throughout the coding process to document interpretive decisions and the reasoning behind category assignments. Peer debriefing was conducted with the co-author to review the classification of excerpts and resolve interpretive discrepancies. In addition, theoretical triangulation was applied by integrating Critical Discourse Analysis, ecocriticism, and *Wild Mind* theory, and an audit trail was maintained to document the procedures of data collection, categorization, and interpretation throughout the research process.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

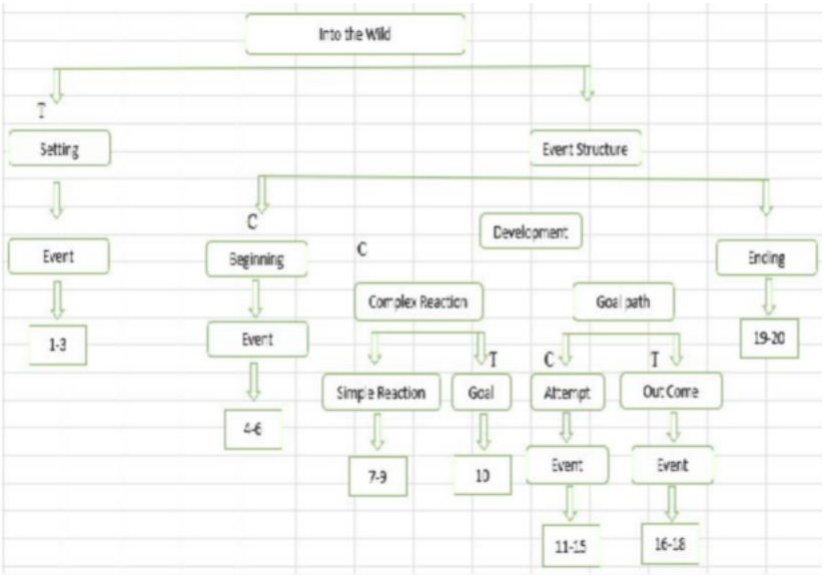
A. Results

1. Theme of the Novel

This study found that the central theme of *Into the Wild* is the search for authentic freedom and self-identity through separation from materialistic civilization and reconnection with nature. Christopher McCandless, dissatisfied with the consumerism and social conformity of his upbringing, donates his savings, abandons his identity documents, and adopts the name "Alexander Supertramp" before traveling across the United States and eventually into the Alaskan wilderness, where he attempts to live through hunting, gathering, and self-reliance. His death from starvation inside an abandoned bus, following his failure to cross the swollen Teklanika River, marks the tragic culmination of a journey that is simultaneously a pursuit of ideals and a confrontation with ecological reality.

Using Renkema's (2004) story grammar framework, the development of the narrative can be interpreted systematically, as illustrated below.

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Setting: the narrative moves across the United States and culminates in the Alaskan wilderness, settings that symbolize the contrast between civilization and nature. **Beginning**: Christopher experiences dissatisfaction with modern society and begins questioning materialistic values. **Simple Reaction**: he reacts by rejecting wealth, family expectations, and conventional lifestyles. **Goal**: his goal is to achieve authentic freedom through direct engagement with nature. **Attempt**: he travels across America and eventually isolates himself in Alaska. **Outcome**: he experiences spiritual fulfillment and personal growth, but inadequate ecological adaptation results in physical decline. **Ending**: Christopher dies in the abandoned bus, leaving reflections on happiness, identity, and humanity's relationship with nature.

The story grammar demonstrates that the narrative consistently develops the conflict between freedom and survival, idealism and reality, and civilization and nature, establishing the discursive terrain on which the novel's ecological niche is constructed.

2. Ecological Niche Depicted in the Novel

Applying the four operational indicators described in the Research Methods, the analysis identifies four discursive categories through which ecological niche is constructed in *Into the Wild*: human alienation from civilization, wilderness as an ecological space, ecological adaptation and survival, and ecological failure. Representative textual evidence for each category is presented below.

a. Human Alienation from Civilization

Christopher's rejection of civilization is marked discursively through a renaming strategy: by adopting the name "Alexander Supertramp" and discarding his identity documents, driver's license, and bank cards, he performs a symbolic act of exclusion from the social and economic system that defined his prior identity. This renaming functions as a positional indicator, marking his self-removal from civilization at the level of naming itself, while his donation of his savings to charity functions as an evaluative act that frames money and materialism negatively. This alienation is stated most explicitly in the declaration he carved inside the abandoned bus that became his final shelter: "no longer to be poisoned by civilization...to become lost in the wild" (Krakauer, 1997, Chapter Sixteen). The verb "poisoned" constructs civilization itself as a toxic agent from which the protagonist must be cleansed, an evaluative choice that inverts the conventional association of the wild with danger and civilization with safety. Consumerism, social expectations, and material success are consistently constructed in the narrative as obstacles to authentic living, reflecting an ideological resistance to dominant social norms consistent with Fairclough's (1995) view of discourse as a site of ideological struggle.

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b. Wilderness as an Ecological Space

For Christopher, wilderness represents freedom, purity, and spiritual renewal; Alaska becomes the symbolic space where he expects to rediscover his authentic self. Nature functions not only as a geographical setting but also as an ecological environment that shapes his beliefs, values, and identity, positioning him as a subject seeking inclusion within, rather than domination over, the natural system. This positioning reflects Garrard's (2012) argument that nature should be understood as an active force shaping identity rather than merely a backdrop for human activity.

c. Ecological Adaptation and Survival

Christopher attempts to survive independently through hunting, gathering, and simple living, demonstrating his desire to become part of the ecological system rather than dominate it. However, his ultimate inability to adapt fully, reflected in his limited practical knowledge of edible plants and his miscalculation in attempting to cross the Teklanika River, illustrates that adaptation to nature requires practical knowledge and environmental awareness beyond philosophical commitment alone. When floodwater blocked his route back to civilization in July, his journal records the collapse of his adaptive confidence in stark, fragmented clauses: "Disaster. Rained in. River look impossible. Lonely, scared" (Krakauer, 1997, Chapter Sixteen).
The clipped, verbless syntax of this entry, so different from the fluent, aphoristic register of his earlier philosophical writing, functions as an evaluative indicator marking the point at which his ecological positioning shifts from mastery to vulnerability. These adaptive indicators show that humans remain dependent upon ecological processes and cannot separate themselves entirely from environmental limitations.

d. Ecological Failure and Tragic Consequences

Despite his spiritual aspirations, Christopher's insufficient understanding of ecological realities eventually leads to failure. His final written statement, "HAPPINESS ONLY REAL WHEN SHARED" (Krakauer, 1997, Chapter Seventeen), functions discursively as a categorical, aphoristic assertion that reverses the ideological premise on which his earlier rejection of society was based, marking a shift in evaluative stance toward human connection at the moment his ecological niche collapses. His death illustrates the conflict between human desire and ecological reality, and demonstrates that, in this novel, ecological niche is portrayed not as a static harmony but as a dynamic and contested relationship between humans and nature, directly reflecting Leibold & Frans's (2021) argument that niche should be understood as a dynamic interaction rather than a static category.

B. Discussion

1. Theme of Into the Wild

The central theme identified in the Results, freedom achieved through separation from civilization, is closely associated with the transcendentalist ideas that influenced Christopher McCandless. The writings of Thoreau, Tolstoy, and London shaped his perception that nature represents truth and purity, while modern civilization symbolizes artificiality and spiritual emptiness. From the perspective of Critical Discourse Analysis, identity is constructed through discourse and social practice (Gee, 2014); in *Into the Wild*, the discourse of freedom is represented through Christopher's lifestyle, decisions, and interactions with others, and through narrative descriptions and intertextual references to philosophical writing, the text constructs freedom as an alternative ideology that challenges materialistic values and dominant social norms. At the same time, the novel demonstrates that freedom is accompanied by responsibility and limitation, so that it is portrayed not as an absolute condition but as a complex process involving self-discovery, sacrifice, and confrontation with reality.

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2. Ecological Niche Depicted in Into the Wild

The findings show that the ecological niche represented in *Into the Wild* is constituted through Christopher's discursively marked attempts to redefine his position within the natural environment: through renaming and symbolic acts of exclusion (alienation), through the construction of wilderness as an active ecological space (wilderness), through practical engagement with survival (adaptation), and through the collapse of that position at the point of death (failure). This four-part construction differs from the related but distinct concept of ecological identity, which concerns Christopher's self-conception as connected to nature, and from the broader, non-positional category of human-nature relationship: ecological niche, as evidenced here, specifically concerns his positional standing, his inclusion, exclusion, and adaptive success or failure, within the ecological system of the narrative.

This finding is consistent with recent ecocritical discourse scholarship. Gach & Adugna (2024) show that ecological discourse is produced through the portrayal of ecological diversity, interspecies interaction, and the redistribution of agency from humans to the natural environment; similarly, *Into the Wild* represents wilderness as an active ecological space that shapes Christopher's identity and consciousness rather than functioning merely as a physical setting. Plotkin's (2013) *Wild Mind* theory further explains that modern civilization alienates individuals from their authentic ecological selves, and Christopher's journey can accordingly be interpreted as an effort to rediscover his "Wild Mind." Nevertheless, the tragic ending of the novel demonstrates that spiritual aspiration alone is insufficient to ensure ecological adaptation: harmony with nature, in this narrative, requires ecological knowledge and practical awareness in addition to emotional attachment and philosophical belief.

Considered together with the theoretical distinctions established in the Introduction, these findings suggest that ecological niche in *Into the Wild* can be productively read not solely as a biological concept but also as a psychological, ideological, and discursive representation of humanity's relationship with nature, a proposal that is developed further in the Conclusion.

CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

A. Conclusions

This study set out to answer two research questions. First, the central theme of Jon Krakauer's *Into the Wild* is the search for authentic freedom and self-identity through separation from materialistic civilization and reconnection with nature. Second, the ecological niche depicted in the novel is constructed through four discursive categories, human alienation from civilization, wilderness as an ecological space, ecological adaptation and survival, and ecological failure, through which Christopher McCandless's positional standing within the natural environment is represented, negotiated, and ultimately lost.

By integrating Critical Discourse Analysis, ecocriticism, and *Wild Mind* theory, this study demonstrates that literary discourse can be read simultaneously for its linguistic construction of meaning, its representation of nature as an active ecological force, and its psychological dimension of human-nature connection. The study contributes to literary discourse studies by proposing ecological niche as a discourse-based analytical construct distinct from ecological identity and human-nature relationship, offering a positional and dynamic lens through which future studies may examine how literary texts construct the relationship between humans and their environments.

Building on this proposal, and consistent with Leibold & Frans's (2021) view that ecological niche is best understood as a dynamic interaction rather than a fixed category, this study proposes that ecological niche in literary discourse be understood not only as a biological concept but also as a psychological, ideological, and discursive representation of human existence within ecological systems, a proposed interdisciplinary interpretive construct that future research may test and refine, rather than a settled theoretical claim. Ecocriticism remains valuable in this respect because, as Garrard (2012) argues, it links literary studies to wider environmental and

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ethical concerns, situating literary discourse as a site for the continuous negotiation of environmental values and human identity.

These conclusions should be read in light of the study's limitations. The analysis is based on a single literary text interpreted qualitatively by a sole researcher, and the categories and indicators used to operationalize ecological niche, while grounded in explicit criteria, remain interpretive rather than exhaustive. Consequently, the findings describe the representations of freedom, identity, and ecological niche constructed within *Into the Wild* specifically, and should not be generalized as claims about humanity or human existence beyond the text.

B. Suggestions

Future researchers are encouraged to investigate broader dimensions of ecological discourse and identity construction in *Into the Wild*, including characterization, symbolism, environmental ethics, and reader response, and to undertake comparative studies involving literary works from different cultural backgrounds to reveal diverse perspectives on human-nature relationships and ecological niche. Employing alternative theoretical perspectives, such as posthumanism, ecofeminism, material ecocriticism, or environmental humanities, may further diversify interpretations of literary texts and extend the interdisciplinary study of ecological niche proposed in this article.

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