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Can Chris Candles be considered a Transcendentalist?

**Introduction**

Humans have a general tendency to seek peace. They have always been striving to attain general relaxation and internal peace. It is, in fact, the need of every person. Every individual, no matter how rich or poor they are or how socially respected they are, yearns to have a quiet and peaceful time sometimes. This state is not related to any sort of financial disturbance and not at all related to money, but some kind of trauma or tragic event in life can trigger the need for such position, which may keep increasing with age or time.

This state of mind or the act of leaving the whole world behind one’s own mental peace and stability is known as “Transcendentalism”. It can be defined as “a protest against the general state of intellectualism and spirituality.” Transcendentalism is a way of life; it is a way how a person sees and takes the world and how they deal with the affair of the world, especially relationships. Trancendalists pave their own way and deal with everything in their own way which gives satisfaction to their mind. Transcendentalism is more related to spirituality than to religion.

**Discussion**

History has seen a number of transcendentalists that have left everything in search of mental peace. These people have chosen the way of spirituality and have sacrificed everything they had to attain it. Such people include a number of famous personalities and celebrities as well. One of such personalities is Chris McCandless.

Originally named as Christopher Johnson, McCandless was born on February 12, 1968, to Wilhelmina "Billie" McCandless (née Johnson) and Walter "Walt" McCandless. He was the first child of this couple. From the very beginning, he was a very sharp and intellectually gifted child and his teachers liked him a lot. He always got good grades in class and passed high school with distinction but his teachers noticed that he was more tilted towards spirituality. He even advocated for running as a spiritual exercise in the school.

McCandless was also known as Alexander Supertramp (Alex), which he chose himself as his pseudonym. He chose an increasingly itinerate lifestyle as he grew up and went on hiking very often. His last hiking trip was to Alaska where he went in 1992. This trip proved to be his last trip as he lost his life while hitchhiking on the Stampede Trail in Alaska.

Chris McCandless or Alexander Supertramp remained extremely controversial throughout and after his life regarding the status of his transcendentality. Many scholars, experts, psychologists and especially philosophers’ debate on the point that although McCandless had left the whole world behind, he had not achieved transcendentalism. These experts debate that he was still in the search of eternal peace but still he had not found it, so he cannot be regarded as a complete transcendentalist. On the other hand, some philosophers and experts are also in favor of this concept. They argue that Chris McCandless was a true transcendentalist. There are multiple reasons for this notion.

Experts and philosophers present the argument that McCandless was one of those very few individuals who had put aside his everything to attain peace and tranquility (Thoreau). He was a non-conformist and wanted to become one with nature. He completely rejected materialism, although he belonged to a very rich and well-off family, and went off in living in a simple way. In fact, he chose the life of a saint for himself, the only difference was that he was more inclined towards spirituality rather than religion.

Another argument that is heavily presented by philosophers, in the favor of McCandless, is that all the aspect of transcendentalism is truly exhibited in his life and living style. He was a complete non-conformist and rejected materialism altogether. He lived on his own terms and conditions. He defined society himself and completed rejected the norms that were set by this fake society for happiness. He also had his own meaning of happiness. Chris McCandless believed in creating his own happiness, which is why he did not care about anything and opted to live and travel in the wild. The only thing he opted for in life was happiness and he found it in wilderness. He preferred to live off the land, on the west coast of Alaska.

Ralph Waldo Emerson in his popular essay “Nature” presents the definition of transcendentalism as “Whoso would be a man, must be a non-conformist” (Emerson). This stance has been strongly advocated in the novel “Into the Wild” by Jon Krakauer. Krakauer put emphasis that McCandless had achieved almost everything that he yearned for all his life. He wanted to live like a free soul, which is why he chose a nomadic life for himself. McCandless knew that for his own kind of happiness, he will have to make a lot of sacrifices, and he was completely content with that.

The author, Jon Krakauer, stresses over the point that Chris McCandless is a staunch transcendentalist because he knowingly follows his transcendentalist thoughts and tenets. These tenets include non-materialism and non-conformity. Clear pieces of evidence related to transcendentalism can be found in the life of the hiker as he was clearly not interested in the material world.

Some of the other tenets of that the transcendentalism that McCandless loved to follow was love and treasury of nature, self-reliance and free thought. All of these traits are clearly exhibited in the journey conducted by him. McCandless hated society from the very beginning as he grew up and did not care about the different aspects of it. The most hateful aspect of the society that he found was the insensitivity of the society. He disliked the fact that society treats the people especially the poor very ruthlessly and the people are left to die.

McCandless also believed in the values of equality as one of the highest values of the transcendentalism (Whitman). He burned all the money he had and went on a road trip. He dealt with the things so simply that when his car broke down in the middle of the desert in Alaska, “he abandoned it in the Arizona Desert” (Krakauer). At another point, the author refers to his non-confirmation in the words that, “to bury most of his worldly possessions in the parched earth of Detrital Wash and then ... burned his last remaining cash”. One of the most meaningful aspects of McCandless life is that he did not keep his views to himself but openly shared them with his fellows and friends. His death also indicates his simplicity that how despite being low on ration, he was persistent to continue his hike and died due to starvation weighing only 30 kg at the time of death.

**Conclusion**

Hence, in a nutshell, it can be concluded that Christopher McCandless was a true transcendentalist. If his life is closely observed, many aspects of transcendentalism can be seen clearly seen, some of the most prominent ones are non-conformity and self-reliance. Although McCandless exhibits these traits willingly and had chosen this path for himself on his own will, many experts and readers doubt whether to call him a transcendentalist or not. But the pieces of evidence clearly point that Chris McCandless was a true transcendentalist.

Works Cited

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