

## ENGLISH – TRACKS & CHARLIE’S COUNTRY

### ***Compare how the two texts demonstrate the value of the natural world.***

Robyn Davidson’s memoir ‘Tracks’ and Rolf de Heer’s film ‘Charlie’s Country’ explore the complexity of the natural world. Both texts demonstrate nature as alluring and having remedial purposes. However, while ‘Tracks’ explores the natural world in the 1970’s from a Westerner’s perspective, ‘Charlie’s Country’ explores the natural world in the modern era from an Aboriginal perspective. Further, where Davidson presents the outback as being a means of bridging the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians, de Heer presents the bush as a means of further dividing Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians.

Both texts demonstrate nature as alluring and having remedial purposes. In both ‘Tracks’ and ‘Charlie’s Country’, Robyn and Charlie ‘escape’ to the desert and bush respectively to get away and ‘live the old way’ as told by Charlie. They attempt to avoid distractions and the hustle and bustle of their homes so that they can ‘recharge’. They both embark on their journey to prove their independence. However, in ‘Tracks’, Robyn’s journey across the desert was done to prove her ‘strength’ and ability to overcome challenges, whereas Charlie went to the bush to live off his ‘own supermarket’ and live the way his ‘ancestors’ did so that he could reconnect with his ‘culture’ and not be forced to conform to white ‘bastard culture’. Through their journeys, Robyn and Charlie have polar experiences – Robyn experiences the allure of nature and connection to land as an outsider, whereas Charlie experiences it firsthand. Robyn befriends Eddie, an Aboriginal man with a connection so strong with the land that she comments he knows it ‘better than he knows his own body’. This observation has been included by Davidson to highlight the differences between Robyn and Eddie, as she frequently got ‘lost’ and relied on a map for most of the trek. In contrast, Charlie experienced the bush as a firsthand Aboriginal man. He was able to ‘reconnect with the land’, demonstrated most clearly when Charlie catches his own ‘barramundi’ and repeatedly praises his fish through phrases such as ‘good fish’, as de Heer has used this scene to communicate to the audience the happiness that Charlie experiences when he is out in the bush, which he deems to be his ‘home’, suggesting that Charlie is happiest when in the bush. Both Robyn and Rick also find restoration in the desert. Robyn develops a sense of ‘mental toughness’, while Rick who ‘needed the trip’ was able to learn about Indigenous culture and how to respect their differences, thus becoming a better person. Robyn also found herself physically get stronger as well. Therefore, both texts demonstrate nature as being alluring and having remedial purposes.

However, while ‘Tracks’ explores the natural world through the perspective of a young white woman in the 1970’s, ‘Charlie’s Country’ does this through the perspective of an elderly Aboriginal man in the modern era. In ‘Tracks’, Davidson presents the natural world as ‘beautiful’ and sustainable in the long-term as a means of living, as Robyn is able to live on her own in the desert and follow a map to reach her destination without much hassle as she is a ‘young’ woman. In contrast, Charlie finds it difficult to maintain his health while out in the bush, as he is an elderly man with ‘lungs’ that have ‘packed it in’. De Heer communicates the irony of Charlie’s lungs’ health deteriorating in the bush as in this modern era, he has access to modern medicines and hospitals to help restore his health, yet he has chosen to live in the bush and suffer the consequences of his health as a result. They both find it difficult to fully isolate themselves in the desert and bush – Robyn is saddled with Rick ‘the photographer’ as well as a ‘radio’ that she can use to communicate with people if she gets into ‘trouble’, and Charlie is somehow always found by his two friends from back home despite being ‘hard to find according to Pete and Lulu. Robyn is labelled as the ‘camel lady’ and becomes a martyr for ‘feminism’ around the world, as in the 70’s feminism was on the rise, and her trek of the desert was condoned in the writing of Davidson and by the world,

suggesting that the audience should also support Robyn's 'trek'. On the other hand, Charlie's stint in the bush and with the 'long-grassers' was met with contempt from Pete and Lulu and his community, with de Heer presenting his desire to live in the bush as abandonment of his community and a desire to go 'any which way' rather than the right way. Thus, while 'Tracks' explores the natural world through the perspective of a young white woman in the 1970's, 'Charlie's Country' does this through the perspective of an elderly Aboriginal man, communicating the difference in their culture and experiences with the natural world.

Finally, where Davidson presents the trek through the desert as a means of bridging the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians, de Heer presents the bush as a means of further dividing Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians as well as dividing Charlie from his community. Along her trip, Robyn meets countless Aboriginal Australians, and is able to bridge the gap between white and Indigenous Australia as she is not racist and wants to 'learn' about their culture. An example of this is her experience with Eddie, an Aboriginal man whom she develops a 'friendship' with despite the Aboriginals in the outback not being trusting of the Westerners as a result of the way they had been treated by them. As well as this, Robyn befriends multiple other Aboriginal community members along her trek who she 'respects' and 'admires', her gentle curiosity contrasting from the insensitive intentions of others. Comparatively, Charlie's journey in the bush isolates him further from the white community in Australia, which to some extent was the purpose of his trip as he wanted to live on his 'own' away from everyone. Following his journey in the bush, Charlie had to be flown to hospital because his health had deteriorated that much, which led to him residing with the long-grassers in Darwin, and heading down a bad path where he made unwise decisions, including where he smashed the police car's windshield with a shovel. De Heer intended for this scene to be a statement of Charlie's hatred towards authority and their demeaning treatment of the Aboriginal Australians. This resulted in Charlie going to jail, where he lost his identity and his culture altogether, leading him to consider living the 'whitefella way', a sign of his defeat and isolation from his community. Therefore, Robyn's trek across the desert is presented by Davidson as a means of bridging the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians, while Charlie's journey in the bush and experiences as a long-grasser further isolates himself from both the white Australian and Indigenous Australian community.

Both texts demonstrate nature as being alluring and as having remedial purposes for Robyn and Charlie. However, while 'Tracks' explores the natural world through the perspective of a young white woman in the 1970's, 'Charlie's Country' explores the natural world through the perspective of an elderly Aboriginal man in the modern era. Finally, where Davidson presents the trek through the desert as a means of bridging the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians, de Heer presents Charlie's experiences in the bush as a means of further isolating himself from his community and strengthening the divide between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians.