

Compare how the importance of personal strength is explored in these texts.

Both Sean Penn and Robyn Davidson explore the importance of personal strength to ensure survival when undertaking an isolated and remote journey through the main characters, Chris McCandless in Into The Wild, and Robyn Davidson, in Tracks. However, it is through her protagonist, Robyn that Davidson demonstrates how difficult it is for a woman to undertake a physiologically and psychologically punishing walk across the Australian desert while also being encountered with sexism and racism, suggesting her need for inner strength to overcome these issues. In contrast, Penn conveys that the profound effects of isolation requires one to be stable and overcome all fears. Both texts though, suggest that relying on personal strength in an isolated environment is virtually impossible and therefore requires human companionship.

Davidson presents the importance of personal strength once an individual faces extreme sexism and racism. Initially, it is the cruel and “maniac” personality of Kurt who takes advantage of Robyn’s labour and subjects her to several exhausting and mental duties. With this “sense of failure” and limited power that Robyn experiences, Davidson suggests her need for personal strength during these challenging times; she snaps under the pressure of Kurt’s unfair treatment, which demonstrates her “fierce pride” and determined personality to overcome the stereotypes behind women. She even encounters sexist attitudes by other train passengers on her way to Alice Springs who question her “lunatic idea” and declare that she should have her “old man” on the journey or she will get “raped.” Eventually, Robyn becomes a “feminist symbol” but this abrasive environment she is surrounded in lingers as Robyn learns about the disturbing treatment of the Aboriginals. When Robyn witnesses a policeman abusing an Aboriginal women in a bar, she feels “helpless anger and disgust.” However, the fact that they “never had a worry in [their] life” despite having their “integrity drained from them” encourages and motivates Robyn to continue her journey by drawing on her strength. Thus, Davidson claims that personal strength is particularly important when coming across sexism and racism.

Penn suggests that living in the Alaskan wilderness requires resilience and the ability to overcome fears. The isolation of the environment is revealed by the medium and close shots of Chris with aerial shots of the landscape depicting the tiny figure of Chris walking alone. With these representations of loneliness, Penn implies the need to defeat one’s worries to ensure survival. At the beginning of the film, Chris openly admits that he is “afraid of water” but the recurring, symbolic interactions with water reflects his willingness to confront and master his fears, which ultimately leads to his next step on the journey. Furthermore, the scene in which Chris decides to paddle down the river illegally without a permit indicates his disregard for authority and “civilisation”, yet his determination despite the immensity of the river, which are supported by the close shot of Chris’s shocked face that give the impression this “river crossing” is “impossible.” Therefore, despite Chris’s extreme isolation and exhaustion in the wilderness, Penn illustrates his reliance on personal strength to get where he wants to be.

Both Davidson and Penn present the protagonist’s abandonment of their previous life and the strong desire for strength throughout the journey. Both Chris and Robyn yearn for freedom and to live a life without being “poisoned by civilisation” and strict routines. This is evident when Robyn abandons her clock in the desert and when Chris removes the number plates before abandoning his car, which symbolises the need to be “free of disguises” and dismiss conventional labels and rules. They are left

with little possessions and mainly draw on their personal strength to continue the trip. With this extreme isolation, Davidson and Penn illustrate the impossibility of relying solely on only one's self and therefore require dependence on human company. As Chris reveals that he is "lonely" and "scared," he is able to gain strength and recover from "going mad" with his relationships, Jan and Rainey who offer him company, donations of food and supplies to continue his trip, suggesting that "happiness is only real when shared." In the same way, when Robyn suffers from a period of depression with the death of her camel, Kate, she is in desperate need to "talk to someone" and is finally able to re-gain her personal strength through Glendle who provides her "comfort" and emotional support. However, Davidson implies that Robyn's success comes mainly from her willingness to accept the help and companionship that others provide on the trip, such as Rick and Eddie. While, the tragedy of Chris in Penn's film indicates that survival becomes impossible when one decides to completely reject human companionship or resisting connections to the chosen family, such as when Ron offers Chris to be his grandson. Thus, Davidson and Penn suggest that despite the desire for independence and isolation, human assistance is unavoidable and necessary especially in challenging times where personal strength is required.

Penn and Davidson explore the importance of personal strength to ensure survival when undertaking an isolated and remote journey through the characters, Chris McCandless in Into The Wild, and Robyn Davidson, in Tracks. However, through Robyn, Davidson illustrates the difficulty for women to undertake a physiologically and psychologically punishing walk across the Australian desert while also being encountered with sexism and racism, suggesting the need for inner strength. On the other hand, Penn suggests that the profound effects of isolation require one to be stable and overcome all fears. Both texts though, suggest that relying on personal strength in an isolated environment is almost impossible and therefore require human companionship.