

What We Write About When We Write About Hurricanes

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George Ripley Stewart's 1941 novel *Storm* played not a small part in how we refer to tropical cyclones today. In this work of sensation fiction, a cyclone is nicknamed "Maria" by a weatherman. This colorful character was based on a real 19th-century Australian journalist who publicly shamed ex-girlfriends and politicians by naming Typhoons after them. In Stewart's novel, "Maria" is pronounced not like the Van Trapp matriarch, but with the long "i" you find in the song "They Call the Wind Maria" from *Paint Your Wagon*—an homage paid by Lerner and Loewe to Stewart's novel: this speaks to the book's popularity, as does the fact that World War II Navy officers started to name Pacific cyclones after their wives (Heidorn). And then the Air Force began to give hurricanes in the Atlantic names, with the US weather bureau finally following suit in 1953. (The inclusion of male names to the roster began in 1978.) However, if a storm's damage is catastrophic, the World Meteorological Organization removes that particular name from circulation out of respect for its victims, i.e., Katrina (*NOAA Atlantic Oceanic and Meteorological Laboratory*). Understandable. Certain scourges—earthquakes, plagues, regimes—can seem too vile to utter by name, and, in fiction, I might argue—with apologies to George Ripley Stuart—removing familiarity from a weather system beyond our control increases the opportunities for metaphor. Moreover, compared to a named storm of superhero strength, an anonymous entity seems more supernatural and mysterious. This type of storm—unknown and unbound—appears in Haruki Murakami's "The Seventh Man" (1988), Lauren Groff's "Eyewall" (2018), and Joseph Conrad's *Typhoon* (1902): in each of these works of short fiction, a protagonist is caught in a cyclone, amplified by its anonymity, which catalyzes a change in the protagonist. Murakami, Groff, and Conrad concoct a crucible of physical, spiritual, and metaphysical torments such that each protagonist experiences the tropical storm as, by turns, 1) a haunting, 2) an alienation, 3) an alternate reality, 4) a possession, and 5) a supreme being—the

cyclone's real and perceived powers ultimately transforming its victim's soul. In other words, a morbid present magnifies past regrets in the face of an uncertain future.

I. A Haunting

"The problem of storytelling is how to make transitions into transformations," Leonard Michaels writes, "since the former belong to logic, sincerity, and boredom (that is, real time, the trudge of 'and then') and the latter belongs to art" (3). Using a catastrophe of weather as a means to offer an eclectic array of transformations, all three authors imaginatively put the reader in the shoes of someone in the midst of a tropical disturbance, an everchanging onslaught of differentiated terrors. These writers shape-shift their storm into monsters, demons, specters, goblins, and devils: each cyclone becomes an amalgamation of malevolent spirits (known in Mandarin as a *wangliang*).

The anthropomorphizing of a storm into a human ghost is perhaps the most common literary haunting performed in these stories. Blithely, Murakami describes the plodding of his cyclone as moving "at the pace of a slow runner" (166). Groff's personifications are more animated and varied; her theatrical menagerie of spirits includes ghostly clothes horses—"...and the metal cages minced away across the lawn, as if ghosts were wearing them as hoop skirts" (88)—angry guests—"The wind seized a flowerpot and smashed it through the microwave" (90)—vaudevillian clowns—"My teak picnic table galumphed itself toward the road, chasing after the chairs already fled that way" (89)—and poignant dancers—"Slowly, the wind softened. Sobbed. Stopped" (97). Later she writes as if ghosts are looting: "The house heaved around me and the wind followed, overturning clocks and chairs, paging through the sheet music on the piano before snatching it up and carrying it away" (94). Structurally, Groff uses these animations of

objects as intermezzi to lighten the mood between visits from talkative ghosts: her late husband, lover, and father.

Sailing off the coast of Southeast Asia, Conrad brings upon the *Nan-shan* a cyclone with enough scary sounds to fill a haunted house. In the following passage, Conrad haunts the wind: "Its howls and shrieks seemed to take on, in the emptiness of the bunker, something of the human character, of human rage and pain—being not vast but infinitely poignant" (34). The author gives the wind the weight of a living thing, too: "It relieved him as though that man had, by simply coming on deck, taken most of the gale's weight upon his shoulders" (Conrad 25). At times, the gale's force takes on the quality of an invisible man—"Its door being hinged forward, he had to fight the gale for admittance"—or the proportion of a sea monster: "The wind had thrown its weight on the ship, trying to pin her down amongst the seas" (Conrad 37, 32). In Groff's story, as the storm strengthens, she turns the wind against itself: "The wind strangled his howls" (31).

Turning from a creature that assaults with sound to one that drowns with water, a massive wave kills K, the best friend of the titular character in Murakami's "The Seventh Man." The author describes a wet appendage designed to inflict deadly harm: "And in its crest, inside its cruel, transparent tongue, what I saw was K" (Murakami 170). Conrad gives his storm a tongue, too, but he flips expectations, granting the wind the power to lick like water: "At the last moment a tongue of air scurried in and licked out the flame of the lamp" (24). Not in "Eyewall," but in Groff's short story "Under the Wave," the author unleashes a tongue in the form of a tsunami: "She was almost asleep when she felt a great tongue licking the edges of her body, and she opened her eyes to see a bloom of black."

Murakami haunts the atmosphere surrounding his story. The long-ago storm is recounted by the seventh man decades later during a proverbial dark and stormy night. Even before hearing the recollection, the reader is conditioned to expect a ghost story: the author evokes a campfire-like mood. The protagonist (unnamed, as is the main character of "Eyewall") recounts what happened to him when he was a boy: a wave had arrived in the late morning, generated by a typhoon. Unlike the protagonists in "Eyewall" and *Typhoon*, though, the seventh man experiences profound loss—he sees K swept away by the tsunami. And the protagonist has failed to rescue him. In the forty years since, the wave has haunted his dreams—every night: "I wake up in the darkness, screaming, breathless, drenched in sweat" (Murakami 173). Just like this wave haunting the protagonist's subconsciousness, Murakami haunts the reader by the atmosphere in which the story is told: the dank, late setting of the story's frame.

II. An Alienation

In contrast to a cyclone's kinetic violence outside, its victim's creature comforts, modes of communication, and psyche are often shut down inside—isolating the individual and making him or her despondent. For instance, Murakami mines his cyclone's ability to warp communication underwater when he sees his friend K inside a wave: the author depicts the seventh man and the friend communicating in wordless telepathy—as only special friends can—until the attempted rescue fails. Thus, by placing a barrier between the friends, Murakami illustrates their supernatural communication, heightening the potency of K's imminent death.

In his novella, Conrad explains to the reader that a cyclone's ability to isolate is precisely what makes it so emotionally galling: "This is the disintegrating power of a great wind: it isolates one from one's kind. An earthquake, a landslip, an avalanche, overtake a man incidentally, as it

were—without passion. A furious gale attacks him like a personal enemy, tries to grasp his limbs, fastens upon his mind, seeks to rout his very spirit out of him" (25-26). Conrad's cyclone not only isolates the individual from safety but from the safety of his or her sanity.

Conrad first conveys isolation by distorting sound. He describes the sonic terror of the roaring sea by orchestrating dynamic shifts and changing acoustics: "After the whisper of their shouts, their ordinary tones, so distinct, rang out very loud to their ears in the amazing stillness of the air. It seemed to them they were talking in a dark and echoing vault" (48). For an exchange on the bridge, he uses soft and loud speech in a way that clarifies each: "Jukes to leeward could hear these two shouting within six inches of his face, as you may hear on a still night half a mile away two men conversing across a field" (31). Elsewhere, words trip over themselves in a communication tube that extends from the deck to the furnace below. The muffled words and lack of volume stoke the frustrated listeners' tempers. And, on other occasions, Conrad leaves out words in dialogue, illustrating how the men can make out words only intermittently due to the crashing waves: "It was a dull yell, more difficult to seize than a whisper. And presently, the voice returned again, half-submerged in the vast crashes, like a ship battling against the waves of an ocean. 'Let's hope so' it cried—small, lonely and unmoved, a stranger to the visions of hope or fear; and it flickered into disconnected words: 'Ship. . . . This. . . . Never—Anyhow . . . for the best'" (29-30). By erasing words, Conrad limits not only what we can hear but what we can see. Hence, Conrad asks the reader to work as hard as his characters to make sense of an artfully marred text. (The author later uses ellipses for humor—in England, Mrs. MacWhirr, yawning, skips over sections when skimming her husband's dull correspondence: "She couldn't be really expected to understand all these ship affairs. She was glad, of course, to hear from him, but she had never asked herself why, precisely. ' . . . They are called typhoons . . . The mate did not seem

to like it . . . Not in books . . . Couldn't think of letting it go on. . . ." (Conrad 54). In this wink to the reader, the character makes sense out of a story without gathering all the information, which is precisely what Conrad had forced the reader to do twenty-five pages before.)

Conrad not only muffles his characters' hearing but impedes their vision. His storm arrives at night and erases the stars. To demonstrate the worsening conditions, he seems to describe a scientific phenomenon not yet discovered when Conrad had written his novella—a black hole: "...the whole black universe seemed to reel together with the ship" (32). Just before the typhoon moves to full force, he writes of a world getting swallowed by the dark: "It unveiled for a sinister, fluttering moment a ragged mass of clouds hanging low, the lurch of the long outlines of the ship, the black figures of men caught on the bridge, heads forward, as if petrified in the act of butting. The darkness palpitated down upon all this, and then the real thing came at last" (25). Since nighttime clouds are invisible, Conrad animates the stars instead, which appear to be moving, winking, swirling, flying, rolling upwards, drifting, and finally disappearing under the cloak of the monstrous beast's approach. It is as if the stars, too, are abandoning hope, while the encroaching blackness becomes a metaphor for isolation—or despair.

In "Eyewall," Groff's first-person narrator retreats from reality by getting drunk. The protagonist's perception approaches Alice-in-Wonderland levels of surrealism. Late in the story, when the character muses about how she will die in the storm, the reader realizes she may be suffering from a deep depression, perhaps from not having conceived. The character revealingly says of bathtubs: "...without someone else within us, we are smooth white cups of nothing" (94-95). Groff, like Conrad, also uses sound to alienate. In a scene where her nameless protagonist waits long hours in a windowless bathroom, Groff epitomizes the hurricane in three words: "the roaring black" (97). (Conrad had written a similarly economic encapsulation of nighttime horror:

"the blind night" [39]. Groff was here perhaps inspired by *Typhoon*.) Later in her story, Groff writes, "the darkness redoubled" (89), as if the storm is a creature that can reproduce, too. Touch, rather than sound, is invoked when the electricity fails: "I felt, rather than saw, the power go out" (Groff 87). The lack of light paints a feeling of self-retreat, too, as the protagonist's vulnerability deepens—"I saw the glass of the window beating, darkness so deep in it that I could see myself" (Groff 93). Just as Murakami's wave haunts his protagonist—reminding him of his inability to save K—the darkness of the storm in "Eyewall" haunts Groff's protagonist by magnifying her own despair. In the kind of isolation brought about by a catastrophe, like a hurricane or a pandemic, the only enemy one may be able to hunt is in the mirror.

III. An Alternate Reality

A storm alters characters' perceptions of time and space in each of these stories. In "Eyewall," when the power goes out, Groff writes, "Time erased itself from the appliances and the lights winked shut" (87). Groff's eradication of the current time is metaphorical as well as literal, for the protagonist begins to do more than just reminisce about her past. She converses, Scrooge-like, with her dead husband, boyfriend, and father. After the last of these séances, Groff's survivor thinks, "time passed, endless, a breath" (97). In these five words, Groff captures the paradox of trauma-time: be the event a hurricane's landfall or the death of a beloved, the last gasp of a catastrophe may arrive, and yet the event can remain immortal in the witness' psyche.

Trauma-time haunts the seventh man, too: September, the month when the wave took away his best friend, is spoken of twice—as if by saying the name of the month, the seventh man could bring his friend back. The date haunts in its permanence. The short story's narrator recollects the

storm forty years after the event, at which point he has only recently recovered from the trauma. It is as if he had been groundhogging the same day for forty years.

Like the appliance clocks gone blank in "Eyewall," Conrad's storm erases time for his characters in *Typhoon*, too. Conrad writes a surreal description of a clock in a scene where Captain MacWhirr encounters a crewman who has been driven mad by the storm's ferocity: "MacWhirr looked up at the wheelhouse clock. Screwed to the bulk-head, it had a white face on which the black hands appeared to stand quite still" (38). The author places the captain in the obstinate hands of fate: his time appears to be up. The relationship to time goes askew not only in this particular scene, but during the entire day and night of the storm as well. The storm will hit, the reader learns, on Christmas Day, but the holiday is not mentioned again until the storm subsides—in the crew's letters back home. Otherwise, Christmas goes chillingly unmentioned by the shipmates: not even is a comment made ironically. In survival mode, dates on a calendar have scant relevance.

In "The Seventh Man," Murakami stops time by freeze-framing a wave in mid-air: "The moment the wave came before me, however, it stopped. All at once it seemed to run out of energy...crumbling in stillness. And in its crest...what I saw was K" (170). The protagonist may have had brain damage, he later claims, so the recollection of this particular event—a careful reader may come to discern—is unreliable. Nevertheless, the narrator's perception is that the wave had stopped long enough for him to face his friend and—through a wall of water—reach in and rescue him. Unsuccessful at this perceived opportunity, Murakami writes, as mentioned before, that the seventh man is exiled by grief and then plagued by PTSD. The typhoon is time's thief. Then, when he returns to his home village, Murakami writes, "...the axis of time gave one great heave" (176). Now, as the storm finally abandons its claim on the seventh man's soul,

Murakami depicts time itself as if it were a typhoon—circular rather than linear: "Forty long years collapsed like a dilapidated house mixing old time and new time together in a single swirling mass" (176).

Murakami evokes outer space to describe how the tsunami affected his countenance: "...it swallowed everything that mattered most to me and swept it off to another world" (163). When this moment is recapitulated, he characterizes the wave as not only otherworldly but a kind of extra-terrestrial being: "It seemed to be some other thing, something from another, far-off world, that just happened to assume the shape of a wave" (170). Murakami paints the earth, too, like a different planet, when he describes how the hurricane has changed the landscape: "...it all looked different: the color of the sky and of the sea, the sound of the waves, the smell of the tide, the whole expanse of the shore" (167).

As the titular storm in *Typhoon* reaches its zenith, Conrad's camera, too, zooms out from Earth: "He [The Captain] watched her, battered and solitary, labouring heavily in a wild scene of mountainous black waters lit by the gleams of distant worlds" (49). The author seems to be using his typhoon to symbolize not exactly the sacred or supernatural but a preternaturally extra-terrestrial point of view. Earlier in the story, too, Conrad invokes the cosmos to illustrate the storm as it encroaches: "The far-off blackness ahead of the ship was like another night seen through the starry night of the earth—the starless night of the immensities beyond the created universe, revealed in its appalling stillness through a low fissure in the glittering sphere of which the earth is the kernel" (Conrad 19). Written decades before the age of satellites, the author lifts us beyond the earth's atmosphere to give the reader the feeling of being lost in space.

Since hurricanes are arguably the most extroverted of inclement weather systems, it is perhaps better for a writer to illustrate the wear and tear by creating an altogether different

universe, considering all the earth processes—wind, rain, hail, tornado, storm surge, flood—an author must juggle. Perhaps this is why, toward the end of "Eyewall," Groff's narrator, reminiscing, takes us underwater, quietly, to a ghost town long-ago flooded by a reservoir. The narrator, remembering a girlhood adventure, dives underwater and discovers another girl's room and looks at herself in the mirror. In this peaceful episode, the author emasculates the hurricane's violence. The submerged human habitation is presented without sentiment. Groff's character remembers a town willfully flooded in order to flash-forward the reader, perhaps, into the near future when towns will find themselves drowned against their inhabitants' wills.

IV. A Possession

When the storm has become established as a creature of evil, annihilation, and a threat to stability, the protagonist starts to feel inhabited or possessed, bringing the character to a breaking point: the moment when he or she must confront an evil inside of himself or herself to move forward.

Early on in *Typhoon*, Conrad benches his plot for a beefy paragraph in order to characterize the storm as a creature of the kind of evil that, when confronted, can make or break a man:

So that upon the whole he had been justified in reporting fine weather at home. But he had never been given a glimpse of immeasurable strength and of immoderate wrath, the wrath that passes exhausted but never appeased—the wrath and fury of the passionate sea. He knew it existed, as we know that crime and abominations exist; he had heard of it as a peaceable citizen in a town hears of battles, famines, and floods, and yet knows nothing of what these things mean—though, indeed, he may have been mixed up in a street row, have gone without his dinner once, or been soaked to the skin in a shower. Captain MacWhirr had sailed over the surface of the oceans as some men go skimming over the years of existence to sink gently into a placid

grave, ignorant of life to the last, without ever having been made to see all it may contain of perfidy, of violence, and of terror. (14)

The upended sea, then, becomes a symbol of life's ups and downs in this passage, which foretells the upcoming tests on the captain's moral mettle: questions of hierarchy, race, class, power, strength, and logistics will take center stage in *Typhoon's* crucible. Yet despite the falling mercury, the captain cannot believe what he sees with his own eyes: "How can you tell what a gale is made of till you get it?" (Conrad 29). Like the storm, he is immune from fear; armed with grit and stupidity, he steers the ship into danger. In navigating his vessel of goods to port without adding the time it would have taken to alter his course to safety, he is more concerned with order and control than survival. He becomes an unwitting evil monster himself—possessed—sailing his men straight into the mouth of a behemoth.

At times, Conrad makes his night storm visible to the captain through the bodies of his secondary characters—a possession of others not spiritual but physical. Jukes, the first mate, becomes a storm unto himself under the spell of his own fear: "Unbounded wonder was the intellectual meaning of his eye, while incredulity was seated in his whole countenance" (22). Jukes seems to resemble the hurricane—his eye the only calm in an otherwise disturbed body. Elsewhere, in summing up a mob of angry Chinese laborers, Conrad describes them as an arid storm: "When the boatswain threw open the door it seemed that an eddy of the hurricane, stealing through the iron sides of the ship, had set all these bodies whirling like dust" (45). (Perhaps Conrad was familiar with Greek mythology, which describes storms in terms of human horsepower. According to legend, giant cyclones were created by the Hecatoncheires, three sea-gods, each with fifty heads and a hundred arms [Grote 519].)

As the cyclone first hits in "Eyewall," Groff perhaps gives a literary nod to Captain MacWhirr in *Typhoon*, describing her protagonist as "... a captain at the wheel, as the first gust filled the oaks on the far side of the lake and raced across the water" (84). The protagonist, like Captain MacWhirr, greets the storm head-on. But unlike him, layers of self-contempt are revealed as the hurricane intensifies. The female protagonist, like the storm, is, as I previously mentioned, unnamed, perhaps so that the reader can self-identify. (We know more about her ghosts and imagined children, who, not incidentally, are the only named characters, other than the lead's first kiss with a girl whose last name itself sounds like a first smooch, Julia Pfeffernuss.) Ultimately, one might think that the main character's decision to ignore the evacuation has less to do with love for her house than her absence of self-respect; as previously mentioned, she cannot bring herself to look in the mirror. She is a vicious storm to herself, self-possessed and hell-bent to sire a child; this protagonist, at one point, imagines her body colonized by a creature, should the hurricane kill her: "I savored each sip of wine and wondered what the end would be ... a water moccasin crawling up the pipes and finding a warm place to nest between my legs" (Groff 95). She imagines a parasite possessing her corpse as its host. Groff performs a heartbreak for her barren narrator inside the horror here: the imagined snake procreating in the very place the narrator had hoped to host a fetus.

Murakami conjures a parasite in his description of storm surge: "I felt like some kind of creature had taken up residence in my mouth" (173). The nightmares of the storm are a kind of possession, hijacking his sleep—his prime years pass without a single romantic companion due to the screams and sweat of his night terrors.

V. A Supreme Being

Murakami brings to his nameless weather event a divine authority over his protagonist's fate.

According to Greek myth, it is not another world but the underworld from which the angry gods find the requisite *drang* to power the *sturm*. As if invoking the idea of an ancient god, Murakami describes hands of a mythological scale: "...a big hand might have swung down from the sky and flattened everything in its path" (167). He refers to the wave as "an absolute giant" (161).

Groff, too, imbues her storm with the wrath of an Old-Testament God's hand: "...towns flattened as if a fist had come from the sun and twisted" [99].

But though water kills the seventh man's best friend, it ultimately cures the narrator. Back at the traumatic wave site, Murakami's protagonist—now an older man—performs an exorcism by plunging himself into the water. For the first time in forty years, he allows himself to walk into the ocean that swallowed up his friend, finding self-forgiveness, perhaps, feeling as if forty years hadn't elapsed. The water itself turns from killer to savior.

The plots of "Eyewall" and Typhoon contain religious themes, too—forgiveness, trials, mercy, humility, redemption—but none of the characters themselves act in a particularly pious way. Nor do they convert, regardless of their close brush with death: the authors avoid the trope where a character strikes a bargain with God to survive. But each protagonist does come to understand something more about himself or herself, as often is the case when an ordinary person finds himself or herself in extraordinary circumstances.

Conrad offers something of a salvation to Captain MacWhirr: the ship gets through the storm perhaps as a reward for the captain ignoring the racist pleas of his crew and restoring the Chinese laborers' money to them if not as equals, at least with equity. As the *Nan-Shan* returns to shore with the boatmen and passengers undamaged by the storm—and each other—Conrad writes:

"...she had about her the worn, weary air of ships coming from the far ends of the world—and indeed with truth, for in her short passage she had been very far; sighting, verily, even the coast of the Great Beyond, whence no ship ever returns to give up her crew to the dust of the earth" (53). In prose that reads like a homily, Conrad implies that the ship has been granted a lesson in grace by Mother Nature. The captain's survival feels earned because the author has taken care to characterize the storm as an evil force. Thus, the victory feels sanctioned on moral grounds. But, Conrad, again, thrusts no religion into his plot directly. No churches, hymns, pastors, or prayers can be found on this ship or back at home in London, plot-wise. Still, indirect references abound. Conrad refers to the conscious casting of the storm as a biblical deity in a letter to André Gide, *Typhoon's* French translator, where Conrad quibbles with the translation of a religious aphorism he has twisted around: "...there is the phrase 'vial of wrath,' when the typhoon really begins. In English, it has Biblical associations. It is somewhat mystic. It suggests an act of God. Precisely what I say in English is: 'It was something formidable and swift, like the sudden smashing of a vial of wrath.' We commonly say in English: 'The Lord has poured out His wrath upon the heads of men'" (Putnam 131-132).

In Groff's "Eyewall," the word "hurricane" appears three times in the first two pages, but then she uses "storm" for the rest of the story (13 times), perhaps, as in *King Lear*, to blur the distinction between the outside storm and inner tempests. The childless protagonist must face her loneliness when the storm refuses to kill her. The author reveals her character's possible past piety when the character thinks, "...the chickens' fear rising through the floorboards to pass through me like prayers" (Groff 84). Like Conrad, Groff's religious references are indirect—here, fear is a simile for prayer. A significant clue, though, that the character has had a religious upbringing occurs when her father's ghost chides her for using Jesus' name in vain. Groff is

perhaps hinting at how religion bubbles up from deep inside in dire situations. During the storm, the chickens under the floorboard perish, but a parting gift of the storm, miracle-adjacent, closes the short story—an egg appears balanced on the doorstep of this woman who openly mourns her infertility.

Though clearly not interested in religious dogma, Groff does graft spirituality and mysticism onto the supernatural tumult, often making the ghastly graceful. Groff writes a reminiscence about the husband's poetry, associating it with the flooding soil outside: "...his words softening the ground of me" (Groff 88). In another instance, she replaces the word "love" with "storm," creating a delicious bastardization of "lovestruck": "A light had been kindled in his eye; it blazed before him, a herald announcing his peculiar self. I looked up at him in the dim of the stormstruck house" (Groff 92). The compound word perhaps implies that as love is to heart, storm is to house: passion squelches the vulnerable in both cases. (Instead of a Liebestod, we have a Liebesturm.) The storm blows to her three resurrections of love—father, boyfriend, husband—offering her moments of respite, contrition, recompense, and, finally, redemption. At the end of the episode with her once-boyfriend (the love of her life, she realizes), the author ornaments their parting: the window imploded, showering us with glass" (Groff 93). The verbs—"imploded" rather than "exploded," "showering" rather than "pelting"—make the shattered glass seem more like confetti, like a sacred blessing.

If not a ghost story, the seventh man's recounting of the wave sweeping away his best friend could be read as a kind of sermon. The exact purpose of this rainy night self-help men's group is withheld from the reader, but we know that all the other men have shared a story, too. Murakami's characters here are not religious either, as far as we can tell, yet the story within the story delivers a missive in the last three paragraphs, full of do's and don'ts. Not unlike Conrad's

association of a cyclone with street violence, the wave created by the storm seems to be an allegory, or a parable for life's hard knocks: "In my case, it was a wave," he said. "There's no way for me to tell, of course, what it will be for each of you." (Murakami 164). The wise father of the narrator in "Eyewall" has a similar warning: "There will always be another storm, you know" (Groff 98).

In a rare intimate moment in *Typhoon*, water heals a cut: "He had got, in some way or other, a cut above his left eyebrow—a cut to the bone. He was not aware of it in the least: quantities of the China Sea, large enough to break his neck for him, had gone over his head, had cleaned, washed, and salted that wound. It did not bleed, but only gaped red" (Conrad 44). Here the giant is gentle and merciful, similar to the egg bestowed outside the protagonist's front door in "Eyewall." In the calm, she finds a healing hope, the reward Conrad's MacWhirr and Murakami's seventh man receive for their hard-won fortitude as well. Appropriately, this peaceful apotheosis with the egg in "Eyewall" happens in the storm's eye, and, curiously, Murakami and Conrad's narrations of their cyclone's wrath end when the eye arrives, too, using the calm as a denouement like Groff. As the stories come to a close, two of the protagonists make a spiritual adjustment within the eye—the "I" in the "eye"—but the third finds a hard-won peace in rebirth years later. Each's protagonist's decision about whether to fight or flee results in a reward (*Typhoon*, "Eyewall") or a concrete punishment ("The Seventh Man").

Conclusion

Groff, Conrad, and Murakami masterfully evoke genres such as sci-fi, the supernatural, the paranormal, the mystical, and the biblical to do justice to a storm's power: an instrument of isolation, possession, ghostly horrors, alternate reality, and Godly largesse that serves as a force

to enact a change in their protagonists. One might categorize these stories, especially Groff's, as cli-fi, an exploding genre for good reason: humans as a race will face more and more extreme weather events—ourselves culpable for the uptick in the exiling, bloodletting, erosion, and destruction. Perhaps we should perceive, as Conrad suggests, a storm as if it's a moral crime, given humanity's role in the climate crisis. The World Meteorological Organization maintains an alphabetic list of twenty-one forenames for potential tropical cyclones in the Western Hemisphere six years in advance, like an overly expectant mother. (People with names that start with Q, U, X, Y, and Z are spared an association with a tempest.) In 2005 and 2020, however, more than twenty-one storms emerged. As the unimaginable becomes commonplace, perhaps we can look to these master writers to help us create the best version of our extinction's collective chronicle, so what is left is not just what happened but how it felt.

On the day I started writing this paper, I witnessed a man walk over the railing and jump into the Hudson River—just like the character at the end of "The Seventh Man." This real, fully clothed man in the water with sneakers perhaps needed the same kind of baptism about which Murakami writes. I keep thinking about that man I saw jump into the Hudson: in pandemic times, I get it. I cannot say I haven't wished to jump in, too. This, I think, is the takeaway I can't help but find in these stories as I write this during the plague of 2020, an age of migration: the things we try to control end up controlling us, but the things we can't control set us free. As is the case with contagious pathogens, fleeing in fear only magnifies the spread of malice. Conrad's captain stays his course, and Groff's character shelters in place, but Murakami's seventh man runs away from home. He only finds redemption by returning decades later and falling into the very water that had given him a half-life of trauma.

Water heals, water kills. Man makes an enemy of Mother Nature—be she spirit, alienator, possessor, deity, or the infinite—at his own peril.

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