

# Narrating Extreme Nature

Joseph Conrad's *Typhoon* (1902) and Jon Krakauer's *Into Thin Air* (1997)

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## **Chapter One: Introduction**

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There are many shades in the danger of adventures and gales, and it is only now and then that there appears on the face of facts a sinister violence of intention.

Joseph Conrad – *Lord Jim*

The notion of standing at one point, mentally or physically, and through processes of change reaching another point, is a central theme in literature. This theme is predominant in texts in which characters are crossing borders and are venturing into unknown areas. In this thesis I will examine the discrepancy between fiction and realism in travel writing by studying two twentieth-century texts which both have man's confrontation with extreme nature as a decisive feature. Humans have always had to adjust to the sometimes uncontrollable and unpredictable natural forces and nature is indeed a thriller only by virtue of its own immense powers. The suspense that inevitably occurs from the contact with violent nature has accordingly found its way into written representation. I have chosen two texts that have been read by many because they supposedly have been written in a manner which accurately mirrors confrontations with extreme nature. In order to address questions of why and how the authors of these texts have accomplished this task, I believe it is essential to look to narrative method.

Joseph Conrad's *Typhoon* (1902) and Jon Krakauer's *Into the Wild* (1996) stand historically far apart from each other. Being respectively fictional and non-fictional works with nearly a century dividing them, they supposedly have very little in common. However, the two texts are united by issues concerning human behaviour and reflection prompted by direct contact with natural violent forces. The characters of the texts face the same, seemingly impossible challenge of surviving the elements while nature is at its most vile and brutal. Extreme nature has quite often been described through the eyes of observers

keeping it at an arm's length or merely "waving at it", to use the words of Peter Hulme. (90) Especially with a view to non-fictional travel writing this is understandable, since the writer would most likely wish to stay alive. Writers of fiction, on the other hand, have the possibility of using whatever devices they require in order to drive their story forward and create the suspense that extreme nature may display. Along the axis of fiction versus non-fiction in literature, I cannot think of any other subject that is more intriguing for the reader, yet difficult to write compellingly about. I am therefore curious of how some of these texts are constructed and why they have become popular in their time. On a few occasions I have personally been challenged by extreme nature to a degree that the risk of being seriously injured has been relatively large. Upon reading these texts I have not only felt certain that the authors write from experience, but also that they possess qualities as writers that enable them to bring the reader into the heart of their imagination and experience. By exerting a closer study of narrative method I will hopefully come to a closer comprehension of the author's intent. If one believes, with Conrad, that there exists a sinister violence of intention, how is it displayed in his narrative and is it applicable to Jon Krakauer's *Into Thin Air*?

With narrative method as the common denominator I will focus on three aspects which I believe will illuminate the narration of the extreme in my primary sources. First, how did Joseph Conrad approach extreme nature in his fictional travel narrative *Typhoon*, compared to Jon Krakauer's approach in his non-fictional narrative *Into Thin Air*? With a view to reader response, is it possible to claim that these approaches are functioning similarly? Second, given the obvious fact that non-fiction and fiction are distinctive genres, how does this discrepancy function when an utterly realistic device such as extreme nature is the decisive feature? Finally, how do narrative method and narration engender, enhance and actualise thematic concerns? Having established these problems as the point of

departure for my thesis, I will now proceed to present the authors and the texts, the theoretical framework of my analysis and my research method. Following this presentation I will recapitulate and summarise the central issues of the problem statement and finally give an outline of the content and structure of the thesis.

Joseph Conrad is not best known today for his short, seemingly straight-forward stories such as *Typhoon*. It is hardly necessary to mention that *Heart of Darkness*, *Lord Jim* and *Nostramo* are literary masterpieces that claim him his fame and respect in modern literature. However, I have chosen to focus on *Typhoon* precisely because it diverges from Conrad's more complex narratives. The mariner and author presumably had reasons for portraying characters and extreme nature in this particular manner, reasons which I find highly interesting in a context where the focus is the narration of extreme nature. Aboard the *Nan-Shan*, Captain MacWhirr and his crew sail out from a Chinese port with a group of Chinese slaves as cargo. During their journey they encounter a ferocious hurricane which in the eastern seas is referred to as a 'typhoon.'<sup>1</sup> Prior to the encounter with this extreme meteorological phenomenon we get especially acquainted with Captain MacWhirr and his young first mate, Mr. Jukes. MacWhirr declines his crew's suggestions of sailing away from the typhoon as they would embark in the next port considerably late and thereby lose money for the shipping company for which they sailed for. Before and during the account of the typhoon we learn of MacWhirr that he seems to be lacking the ability to imagine. There are facts that he dutifully relies on, and when his crew approach him with alternative solutions because of possible consequences for the crew or the cargo, he accuses them of having 'fancies', meaning foolish imaginations. His lack of imagination is effectively

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<sup>1</sup> The term 'typhoon' derives from the Chinese words 'tung' (east) and 'fung' (wind), which is pronounced 'tu-fau' in its original language. The features of a typhoon equal those of a hurricane, which is the common name for this weather phenomenon in the western hemisphere. (Hirth, 260)

displayed in juxtaposition with Jukes, who in several passages reflects on the situation they are facing in order to comprehend both what will happen when they encounter the typhoon and the odd personality of his captain.

Joseph Conrad was for many years attached to life at sea himself. He grew up in Poland when it was a Ukrainian province under the Tsar-regime. The political affiliations of his parents and Russian land reforms had resulted in the confiscation of all his family's land. The result led to poverty and hunger and when his family in 1862 was sent to an internment camp in Vologda, about 300 miles east of Moscow, for "clandestine revolutionary activity" (Stape, 5), his childhood spiralled rapidly downhill into grief and misery. The harsh conditions in the internment camp lead to his mother's death when he was eight, followed by the death of his father four years later. A few years later, under the guardianship of his uncle, he continually expressed a desire to go to sea. His uncle and family protested heavily, but "the youth persisted, and in 1874 [he] travelled on a Russian passport to Marseilles to become a seaman" (Stape, 7). For nearly twenty years he sailed for French, Belgian and English merchant ships before settling in England to become a writer and novelist.

These years undoubtedly give credibility to his sea narratives, although there is no certain evidence that he ever experienced a typhoon himself. However, there is hardly any doubt that one would, during twenty years at sea, encounter violent winds. At the time when Conrad was working as a sailor, meteorological predicaments were unsophisticated compared to today's standards. Paradoxically, the lack of such experience was *MacWhirr's* greatest problem which eventually led the ship into the typhoon. The novel became popular at the time it was published; it was read as a straight-forward, simple adventure story. As indicated already, it is among the lesser known of his works and most of the critical attention directed at Conrad's fiction tend to focus on his more complex narratives. Raising

questions of race, imperialism, human morality, psyche and duality in man, works like *Heart of Darkness*, *Lord Jim* and *Nostramo* have been canonized and considered as examples of Conrad's literary genius as well as key texts of European Modernism. However, as literary trends and academic interests are constantly changing, recent critical attention has been directed at *Typhoon*. New layers in Conrad's authorship are emerging and being discovered in rhythm with changing trends in literary studies. There is arguably few authors' work which responds to such changes to the extent Conrad does.

According to Peter Hulme, Paul Theroux, Bruce Chatwin, Peter Matthiessen and Robyn Davidson formed a quartet that in various manners invented new forms of travel writing during the 1970s and onwards (Hulme, 90). As Hulme further explains, "John Krakauer's writing represents an extreme version within this recent tradition" (96). According to Krakauer himself, his passion for the extreme began with a present from his parents on his eighth birthday. Equipped with an ice axe he was taken along to a climb on a local mountain for a relatively easy ascent. Paradoxically, this trip opened up to a lifestyle that failed to meet the hopes and aspirations his parents had for him. Instead of following a career in medicine or law after graduating from college, he took on random jobs within the building industry. Initially, his aim, and obsession, was to finance climbing expeditions. Eventually, tired of the same, mindless jobs, which also took him away from what he considered to be his true element, he discovered that he could earn a substantial amount of money by writing articles for magazines. This was a realization he evidently shared with Joseph Conrad.

*Into Thin Air* (1997) is a further development of a reportage Krakauer did for *Outdoor Magazine* in 1996. Thematically, this text serves as an example of several travel texts that have been published over the last three decades. The tendency is that challenges become more spectacular and new information technology requires a steady and precise



handling of facts. Krakauer's employers wanted to give a presentation of the increasingly commercial expedition industry that had been, and still is being built up around Mount Everest. The outcome of the expedition drastically changed when, briefly after starting the descent from the summit, the climbers encountered one of the violent storms that frequent high altitude mountains. Due to the number of deaths and severe injuries caused by the storm, the expedition has become known as the 1996 Everest disaster. A few of the other participants, in both Krakauer's and other expedition teams, have written accounts and various articles based on the catastrophic event in which eleven people lost their lives and several others suffered severe frostbites and exhaustion.

Other works by Krakauer include *Into the Wild* (1994), an account of a young American who followed his dream of surviving single-handedly in the Alaskan wilderness and eventually succumbed due to poisoning and starvation. His most recent work is *Under the Banner of Heaven* (2003), a documentary concerning religious polygamy and violence within the Mormon Church in the U.S.A. Krakauer is presently in Antarctica, climbing many of the unclaimed peaks towering over the icecap. He has also written numerous articles for magazines and newspapers, especially for the above mentioned *Outdoor Magazine*. Many of these articles are reprinted in the compilation *Eiger Dreams* (1990).

In the writing of this thesis I will have neither the advantage nor the disadvantage of being able to study a rich selection of literary theory about the texts which I will consider. As Edward Said has been among the many to observe, "Critical literature about Conrad is, to use one of his favourite words, immense" (Najder, 23). Yet, surprisingly few of these volumes have devoted considerable attention to *Typhoon*. In *Conrad's Narrative Method*, Jakob Lothe comments:

In her early study of Conrad, M. C. Bradbrook considers 'Typhoon' a mere 'yarn'. Douglas Hewitt finds that in this novella 'Nothing happens which... seems "to throw a kind of light" on moral or spiritual issues'. Guerard admires the text for its characterization and evocative prose, but claims that its 'preoccupations are nearly all on the surface... Thus Typhoon requires no elaborate interpreting'. (102)

However, as Paul Bruss warns, "One must, nevertheless, guard against reducing these tales to trivial exercise" (Bruss, 122). Accordingly, a few critics, such as Paul Bruss, Jakob Lothe, Susan Jones and Jeremy Hawthorn, have made an effort to look behind the 'preoccupations on the surface' and point to the more complex features of *Typhoon*. It is worth mentioning that critical contributions often consider *Typhoon* in relation to larger thematic concerns. Such is the case with Susan Jones' article "Conrad on the Borderland of Modernism" and Jeremy Hawthorn's chapters on the use of imagination in *Narrative Technique and Ideological Commitment*. Jakob Lothe's *Conrad Narrative Method* and Paul Bruss' *Conrad's Early Sea Fiction* both have chapters that address the narrative method of *Typhoon* directly. Lothe's notes on authorial narration and simplicity and Bruss' arguments about the ironic diminishing of the narrative have proved especially helpful. In the vast collection of Conrad criticism, of which I have had to use just a small selection, I have benefited greatly and found good source material in Edward Said's *Joseph Conrad and the Fiction of Autobiography* and Christopher Cooper's *Conrad and the Human Dilemma*. Further useful volumes are *Joseph Conrad: Voice, Sequence, History, Genre*, edited by Jakob Lothe, Jeremy Hawthorn and James Phelan, *The Cambridge Companion to Joseph Conrad*, edited by J.H. Stape, and the Norton Critical Edition of *Heart of Darkness*, edited by Paul B. Armstrong.

Literary criticism of Jon Krakauer's writing is non-existing, a fact which might stem from various and also obvious reasons. First, *Into Thin Air* was published in 1996 and is

therefore a recent text in academic terms. Second, Jon Krakauer is a journalist who has become an author of books. His affiliation to journalism is evident as he, throughout all his books, makes a great effort to prove that what we read is factual information. His thorough display of evidence serves to distract the reader's attention away from narrative issues and often give his writing the form of documentary rather than suspense-oriented narratives. For the reader, and from a critic's point of view, such accumulation of evidence may give the impression of objectivism. Further, *Into Thin Air* is so overtly rendered, and its themes so transparent, that an enlightened and interesting academic interpretation of Krakauer's text alone could prove to be an underachievement. Critical attention has therefore, understandably, been limited to newspaper reviews rather than lengthy articles in academic journals. For these reasons I have brought Krakauer together with one of the most criticized authors in order to address questions of narrative method. With basis in the chapter on *Typhoon* I will proceed to discuss *Into Thin Air* in light of the previous interpretation. The literary criticism on Conrad and the selection of general narrative theory will therefore also be relevant to *Into Thin Air*.

Narrative theory which is not specifically concerned with Conrad's writing will be supporting the discussion of the texts. In the process of establishing a theoretical framework for this thesis, I have benefited greatly from Dorrit Cohn's *The Distinction of Fiction*. Cohn's approach to narrative method is essential to the discussion of differences between fictional and non-fictional texts which can be applied to travel writing at large. Simply put, this approach is the study of "the translation of mental experiences or visions into language" (Cohn, 7). However, as she notes:

Narratology has been largely disregarded by modern theorists in the ongoing discussion of fictionality. [...] There is a certain poetologic justice to this snub:

narratologists themselves have, to a quite astonishing degree, ignored the question of demarcation between fiction and non-fiction. (109)

If her accusation is correct it does not come as a surprise, for it is a highly complicated task to navigate in this particular theoretical landscape. Since there is a discord between theorists about how to interpret fictional and non-fictional texts, I choose to approach narration in *Typhoon* and *Into Thin Air* with the words of caution asserted by Cohn. Truth is inevitably changing, a feature that ultimately affects the theories that are developed in order to establish consistency. Nevertheless, “without aiming for completeness” (130), Cohn has attempted to establish theories in order to recognize narrative methods which are typical in fictional texts, also discussing how they will function in literary environments that are allegedly real. In *The Distinction of Fiction* she schematises three signposts of fictionality which I will have in mind while working with my chosen texts, and which I will return to identify in the concluding chapter. First, there is the synchronic bi-level model, which is the relation between the events referred to by the text (story) and the way these events are presented (discourse). According to Cohn, the relation between ‘story’ and ‘discourse’ “cannot claim equally encompassing validity for texts that refer to events that have occurred prior to the narrative embodiment” (130). Second, there is the narrative situation in which aspects of narrative points of view have to be considered. On this point, Cohn is mentioning the presentation of consciousness as a decisive feature. Finally, there is the relationship between narrators and authors. In a non-fictional narrative there has to be an obvious connection between the narrative voice and the person who is narrating the story, but as Cohn suggests it is also “a meaningful conception of the vocal origin of fictional narratives” (131).

There is evidently an extensive use of anachronies in *Typhoon* which, suggestively, resembles certain passages of *Into Thin Air*. For the analysis of elements of temporal order I have drawn on Gérard Genette's *Narrative Discourse*. His definition of anachrony is:

to compare the order in which events or temporal sections are arranged in the narrative discourse with the order of succession these same events or temporal segments have in the story, to the extent that story order is explicitly indicated by the narrative itself or inferable from one or another indirect clue. (35)

In both narratives, the arrangements of temporal order can be related to three particular functions, according to Genette. *Analepsis*, which is the most frequent device in both narratives, is “a narrative that is temporally second, subordinate to the first [...]” (48). A *prolepsis* is an “anticipatory summary” (67) which to a varying degree points to later events in the narrative. Finally, an *ellipsis*, which is the “story time elided” (106), occurs when there is a gap in the narrative time presented in the discourse. Within all these categories Genette operates with several sub-categories and mutual connections. These categories are too comprehensive to include in my discussion, but I will elaborate on some of them which I believe are particularly relevant to my primary sources.

The time span separating *Typhoon* and *Into Thin Air* call for explanations where M.M Bakhtin's theories of spatial and temporal aspects will be relevant. Further, since I have chosen to discuss the discrepancy between fact and fiction in travel literature, I find it interesting to establish the textual ‘chronotope,’ Bakhtin's coining of the fusion of time and space in literature:

Time, as it were, thickens, takes on flesh, becomes artistically visible; likewise, space becomes charged and responsive to the movements of time, plot and history.

This intersection of axes and fusion of indicators characterizes the artistic

chronotope. The chronotope in literature has an intrinsic generic significance. It can even be said that it is precisely the chronotope that defines genre and generic distinctions, for in literature the primary category in the chronotope is time. (Bahktin, 84)

Bahktin's theory will not be specifically referred to in my discussion, but the notion of the chronotope is the basis for sequences which concern the placing of the text in their cultural, social and political context. Even though such issues are not emphasised in this thesis, I have chosen to incorporate the historical angle for the benefit of structure and in relation to the discussion of theme.

Giving that travel writing has a relatively short history as an academic discipline, the amount of narrative theory on the subject is sparse. Since such literature has largely been preoccupied with historical, political and sociological themes rather than narration, I have benefited more from narrative theory. However, the advancement of travel writing as an individual area of research justifies topics such as the one I discuss in this thesis. The discourse concerning travel writing has been forwarded by literary researchers, including those contributing to *The Cambridge Companion to Travel Writing*. This volume has been a useful source in order to consider the texts in their historical context. Helen Carr and Peter Hulme's articles, "Modernism and Travel" and "Travelling to Write", give a helpful overview of travel writing in the periods in which these two texts were written. Furthermore, in the article "Travel Writing and its Theory" Mary Baine Campbell claims that "A text that generically proffers itself as 'true', as a representation of unaltered 'reality', makes a perfect test case for analytical work that tries to posit or explain the fundamental fictionality of all representation" (263). This thesis makes no such claim. However, the notion of fictionality as something that one will not find exclusively in fiction

is very interesting. Thus, theoretical concerns of travel writing, here presented by Campell, give validity to the comparative analysis which is subjected in this thesis

A theoretical framework is important in order to explain why and how the narration in my primary sources has been developed. However, I wish to emphasise that it is *not* my intention to juxtapose the fictional and the non-fictional text in similar schematic organisation of theories. I will therefore decline drawing parallels between the texts, but rather point to aspects which suggest resembling functions considering reader response and the actualisation of thematic concerns. Considering the history of travel writing, however, I believe that *Typhoon* is a very interesting example of early modernist fictional travel writing which is culpable for how travel writers approach their work today. With regard to *Into Thin Air*, I believe that this influence is evident as a bearer of the thematic notions of violent nature which Conrad incorporated into his fictional work. In order to use the fictional work as a basis for the interpretation of the non-fictional one, I refer to *Typhoon* in the chapter concerning *Into Thin Air*. The majority of the points supporting my argument will thereafter be accounted for in the concluding chapter. I believe that this approach will comply better with Cohn's argument that interpretative tools "need to be qualified or modified before they can be applied to non-fictional narratives" (110).

In *The Mirror and the Lamp*, M.H. Abrams identifies and explains mimetic, pragmatic, expressive and objective traditions of theory. Of pragmatic theory he claims that "Looking upon a poem as a 'making,' a contrivance for affecting an audience, the typical pragmatic critic is engrossed with formulating the methods [...] for achieving the effects desired" (Abrams, 16). It is thus the audience who are at the centre of interpretations, opposed to the world, the author and the text itself, respectively. It is the analysis of "a literary text as a systematic play of codes which effect the interpretative responses of the reader" (Abrams, *Glossary of Literary Terms*, 51), which will be my primary approach

throughout this thesis. However, this definition is obviously very limited as research method as it does not consider any of the critical orientations that have arisen within pragmatic theory. From the development of Formalism and Structuralism at the beginning of the 1920s, there has been a rapidly growing body of affiliated critical approaches and counter-movements. Bakhtin's 'historical dialogue' and Saussure's 'signifier' and 'signified' are fundamental contributions to the research of language in literature. Deconstructionism and poststructuralism have proceeded as either further developments or counter movements. Within the pragmatic tradition of criticism I will place my methodical approach in between text-oriented and reader-oriented criticism. With a non-fictional text and a sea-narrative by Conrad as objects of study, it would have been futile to consider the texts without considering authorial aspects. Furthermore, with a focus on narration and also on reader response, the method of research seems to be the best approach in order to give an analysis of narration in travel writing.

In the following paragraphs I will recapitulate and outline my main critical concerns and the structure of the thesis. *Typhoon* and *Into Thin Air* will be analysed in two separate chapters. In these chapters there will be a similar progression regarding the distribution critical observations and concerns. I have indicated that the historical context is not my primary interest in this thesis. However, it was not until the late 1970s that poststructuralist theories and deconstructionism allowed fiction in relation to travel to be a proper part of the academic discourse. With regards to commercial interests this trend has not been manifested in the travel writing market, since the general tendency is that consumers are inclined to ask for factual narratives. But the question is whether contemporary travel writers are merely nineteenth century reactionaries or, on the other hand, they have been influenced by modernist aesthetics and method. There is no simple answer to this question. However, in a discussion about fictional and non-fictional travel



writing, with nearly a century dividing the publishing of texts, the question of fiction versus non-fiction would appear to justify the inclusion of historical context. Moreover, the distinction of fiction seems to be less elusive as long as the historical context is considered.

Aided by the theories of Genette, Cohn and Bahktin I will compare the two narratives discussing both the differences and the points of similarity between fiction and fact. The focus on reader response will further be incorporated in the discussion since I believe that an omission of 'the reader' as an active participant would have considerably weakened my argument. This approach is due to the fact that many of the methodical features seem to have been created with a particular intention in mind. Why would for instance Conrad make use of the sudden elliptical change if not for disturbing the reader's modal attitude? Why would Krakauer tell that people were going to die in a narrative form that resembles prolepsis if not to instruct the reader to take interest in *how* this happened?

Finally, an interesting feature of considering narrative method is to be able to study how the respective methods enhance and actualize the display of a certain theme. Even though my primary sources belong in different genres, they are united by a common thematic concern. Conrad warns against the consequences of relying solely on modern technology and abandon ancient seamanship for the benefit of earning more money. Krakauer, yet more ambivalently, warns against an industry that also seems to have been corrupted by profit-taking and additional fame. Both authors use certain aspects of narrative method in order to expose their opinions. However, in Karakauer's non-fictional narrative it is also clear that he wants the reader to make up his or her own opinions.

The object of study in this thesis is the narrative presentation of man's confrontation with extreme nature. Thematic concerns such as personal change, human psyche, and human interaction are predominant themes in travel narratives at large and even more so

when characters are exposed to life-threatening situations. I will discuss narrative method and narration in two narratives in which extreme nature is a decisive feature of the actualisation and enhancement of thematic concerns. In Joseph Conrad's *Typhoon* and Jon Krakauer's *Into Thin Air*, the reader is presented with the drama that occurs when nature is taking over the control over body and, eventually it seems, the mind. However, these texts are respectively fictional and non-fictional, and they were written at the beginning and the end of the twentieth century. Thus, I will not be able to execute a comparative analysis based on equal generic and historic grounds. I have still chosen to bring these two texts together because there are aspects of narration and thematics which resemble each other. The generic difference opens up for the highly interesting discourse on the discrepancy between non-fiction and fiction in travel writing. In order to illuminate the narration of extreme nature I will discuss the narrative method in two narratives with nature's violence as a decisive feature, comment on reader response, look at how the narrative methods resemble each other and point to how thematic concerns are engendered, enhanced and actualised.

As indicated already, Conrad's *Typhoon* is not one of his most famous novels, nor among those that have received much critical attention. 'Simplicity' and 'irony' are two labels used to characterise its narrative properties, but the action-driven short story nevertheless gained popularity when it was published. Even though *Typhoon* stands apart from Conrad's more complex narratives, it still has supreme qualities and relevance as a fictional portrayal of extreme nature. Considering the story an early modernist travel narrative, it is therefore eligible for academic interpretation. *Into Thin Air*, by Jon Krakauer, has also gained ground as an acclaimed, though controversial, work within extreme travel narratives. It is an account of a true story and accordingly not an obvious choice as primary source in a thesis occupied with narrative method. However, the manner in which the

account is written indicates that the author has reflected on how to narrate his story in order to present it in the best possible manner.

For theorists who work with borders between fiction and non-fiction, there seems to be a highly elusive problem using literary terms developed for the study of fiction in order to categorise non-fictional narratives. Obviously, there is a paradox in the realisation that when stories are no longer invented, temporal and spatial references have to be accurate. The fictional interpretative system has after all been developed with a considerable freedom considering such aspects. In order to clarify the distinctions between fiction and non-fiction I have established a theoretical framework which includes the relationship between story and discourse, the narrative situation and the relationship between narrator and author. The interpretation of *Typhoon* will serve as the point of departure for the interpretation of *Into Thin Air*. There is further an extensive use of the techniques of order and duration in *Typhoon* and similar functioning devices in *Into Thin Air*. In both narratives, the arrangement of temporal segments incorporates evocative devices which serve to anticipate events in the narrative (prolepsis), both by breaking up the linear narrative and adding information on plot and characters (analepsis) and by alternating the narrative duration by passing over or withholding information (ellipsis). Additionally, there are certain historical issues that need to be included in order to consider the temporal and spatial context in which the texts were written.

To sum up, in order to discuss the narration of the extreme in Conrad's *Typhoon* and Krakauer's *Into Thin Air* I have asked, with a view to narrative method, how do these texts approach extreme nature how can the narration affect reader experience? To what degree does the generic distinction between fiction and the non-fiction influence the process of creating extreme narratives? In light of narrative methods, how have the authors enhanced and actualised their thematic concerns? These problem statements are

interdependent and it would serve the structure of my thesis poorly if I were to address them in the order they appear above. With basis in the discussions of the texts, I will link the results to the problem statement in the concluding chapter. As pointed out earlier in the introduction, I will be discussing the texts in two separate chapters. These chapters have a similar structure regarding issues which I will study in order to discuss the problem statement of my thesis.

## **Chapter Two: *Typhoon* – The Sinister Violence of Intention**

*Typhoon* is not unique considering the history of literature. As long as tales of oceanic adventures have existed they have fascinated and thrilled listeners and readers alike. With a vast amount of thematic issues and mythical aspects to work with, authors have continuously explored various sides of the life onboard a ship. Being a sailor himself, Conrad had a frame, or a basis for his fiction from which he benefited greatly. As we know, many of his titles revolve around different dilemmas and problems that occur in a confined space upon water. Accordingly, *Typhoon* is not unique considering his authorship either. However, it is unique because it is written in a manner that diverges from the majority of Conrad's works and from fictional sea-narratives at large. This chapter will discuss Conrad's reasons for adopting a particular narrative method in order to convey the extreme in *Typhoon*. In *Conrad's Narrative Method*, Jakob Lothe refers to Berthoud in order to outline his approach to Conrad's texts:

According to the philosophical distinction between causes and reasons, it is a logical error to treat reasons in terms of causes. If we ask, for instance, with Berthoud, why Conrad wrote *Lord Jim*, the answer may be subsumed under 'cause' or 'reason' depending on the assumptions we make. 'In the former case we will reply: "Because of the bibliographical, psychological and social conditions that determined his actions"', and we will undertake a programme of research into his life and times. In the latter case we will answer: "Because he saw, felt, understood, imagined something which he wished to explore and communicate", and we will address ourselves to the work in order to discover what it is'. (Lothe, 2)

First, Lothe's reasoning on *Lord Jim* can easily be transferred to *Typhoon*. Conrad spent twenty years as a professional officer in the British Merchant Fleet and must clearly have

‘seen, felt and understood’ something during this period that he wanted to communicate. The manner in which this text is written, which has caused many critics to dismiss it as something of poorer quality than many of his more renowned titles, may well be exactly at the heart of what he imagined. Second, since I will compare the narrative method of *Typhoon* with a contemporary non-fictional narrative, addressing ‘reason’ seems to be a sensible approach. By focusing on method, and by comparing *Typhoon* with an extreme narrative of our time, it is evident that Conrad’s method has exerted a remarkable influence not only on writers of fiction, but also on those who attempt to reproduce historical events in written form.

What Conrad imagined and eventually wanted to communicate he necessarily had to convert into a language that, as far as possible, corresponded to his actual experiences. Traditionally, travel narratives have had a shortfall of impressionist language which authors such as Conrad were the first to incorporate in modernist texts. This demarcation between fictional and non-fictional narratives has been demonstrated by Conrad himself in his autobiographical narrative *The Mirror of the Sea* (1906). In *Typhoon*, Conrad is merging his imaginations and his experience in order to explore thematic issues related to passages in extreme nature.

By the turn of the twentieth century, writers reported back to their cultural centres from the colonised corners of the world. Development through a century has obviously changed travel writing since “the years between 1880 and 1940 are perhaps best seen as the beginning of the era of globalization in which we live today” (Carr, “Modernism and Travelling,” 70). *Typhoon* was written at the peak of this period when the world, particularly the western world, had drastically changed its infrastructural patterns. For those who could afford it, industrialisation and modernisation made it easier to travel around the globe. Either by own initiative, affiliated to merchant fleets or as workers in the colonies,

writers developed the 'habit of flux', as Ford Madox Ford coined the new trend in *The English Novel* (1930). According to Helen Carr "Ford dated the beginnings of this increased mobility to the eighteen forties" (70). However, Carr goes on to note that:

As Eric Hobsbawm points out: in the four decades between 1876 and 1915 a quarter of the world's land mass was acquired as additional colonies by the main imperial powers, Britain itself adding about four million square miles to its territory Much of British travel writing in these decades emerged, in one way or another, out of the possibilities opened up by such colonial and trade development. (73)

Within contemporary travel writing one of the most specific changes that has taken place is a constantly expanding market for narratives that purport to be historically accurate. The growing demand for this type of literature has consequently led to accusations of plagiarism and falsification of facts, often in compliance with authorial aspirations for fame and higher sales. In the early stages of Modernism, contrary to the tendencies in contemporary travel texts, writers started to experiment with fictional travel narratives. Owen Knowles states in "Conrad's Life" that "Outwardly the Far Eastern settings of his early work fitted the taste for exotic fiction created by Robert Louis Stevenson and Rudyard Kipling and prompted many reviewers to place Conrad with those writers" (10). Works such as *The Voyage Out* (1915) by Virginia Woolf also marked a radical departure from mere travel accounts, and further incorporated issues such as personal change or growth, alienation and imperialistic critic. Concerning the latter issue there was reluctance to be too condemning as the authors relied on having a market that would support their writing. With a few exceptions such as Hilarie Belloc's *The Modern Traveller* and J.G. Frazer's *The Golden Bough*, the critique was therefore either balanced or made covert, a feature that critics claim to be evident in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*. Many of the writers moved around frequently and incorporated their journeys in fiction where travelling was central to theme and plot.

Contemporaries to Conrad such as above mentioned Kipling, Stevenson and Woolf, and further, Jack London, Somerset Maugham, D.H Lawrence, E.M. Forster, Graham Greene, and Evelyn Waugh, all fall into this category. Common for all these writers was that they lived and travelled in a time when the frontiers of the world were brutally changed. As a result, Helen Carr notes that “in both imaginative literature and travel writing, modernity, the meeting of other cultures and change are inseparable” (“Modernism and Travel,” 74). This comment can be linked to my position, as set out in the introduction, that it is possible to consider examples of imaginative literature as part of the inclusive concept of travel writing.

Conrad commenced his seafarer career in the beginning of this period and was accordingly ‘in flux’ for a reason other than writing about it. However, the early writing that emerged from colonised areas was often written with educational purposes in mind. Conrad’s *The Congo Diary* and the *Up-River Book*, which he wrote during his service on *Roi des Belges* in 1890, are examples of early travel writing which reports Conrad’s experience of sailing up the Congo River. These are written in the style of accounts and especially the *Up-River Book* can be read as a guiding manual for the handling of ships in, for many European sailors, unfamiliar waters. When Conrad ambivalently decided to go ashore and encapsulate his experiences at sea between book covers, the shift in literature had been manifested parallel to shifts in art at large. What was later to be defined as the modernist era also became apparent in the manner authors used the aspects of travelling in their writing. As Helen Carr explains:

There was a move – as in imaginative literature – from the detailed, realist text often with an overtly didactic or at any rate moral purpose, to a more impressionistic style with the interest focused as much on the travelers’ responses or consciousness as their travels. (71)



Conrad was thus a part of the modernist movement that contributed to the commencement of a new literary epoch which also was emerging within travel writing.

With *Typhoon* the then indebted author launched his work into a different source of income as the short stories first was published serially in *Pall Mall Magazine* from January to March in 1902. He realised that it was considerably more profitable to sell the stories to magazines than selling publishing rights for complete novels. Accordingly, these texts reached a broad audience as it was considerably cheaper to buy magazines than novels. The *Typhoon* serial was well accepted and became vastly popular for a short period at the beginning of the twentieth century. As the cost of gaining access to his novels was reduced, lesser educated people read his work. A possible consequence might have been that Conrad adjusted the complexity of his narratives in order to meet with a certain level of understanding. With a view to contemporary literary criticism, which tends to distinguish between popular minded and more advanced writing, this approach demonstrates the vast versatility and sagacity of Conrad's method. Travel writing has traditionally not been accredited the most advanced narratives, nor has the genre been embraced by literary critics for such qualities. Until the late 1970s, the genre has been considered as fundamentally non-fictional and accordingly not been regarded as literary in the artistic meaning of the word. With the inclusion of writers such as Conrad, Woolf and Kipling, and the new generation of travel writers which emerged thirty years ago, travel writing as a genre entered the modern era of writing.

According to Cedric Watts, Conrad himself emphasised that the human drama was the primary interest in the text and that the weather was of lesser significance. Even though the weather as a phenomenon apparently was of lesser interest to Conrad, he still wanted to "put all that elemental fury into its proper place" (Watts, xii). Accordingly, the methodical function of the typhoon is quite obviously the device which causes the personal change in

*Typhoon*. What Conrad must have meant is that there is a discrepancy between the meteorological signification and the effect that occurs when humans are exposed to the violence that weather can exert. Thus, in a literary context the result of bad weather is only interesting in combination with aspects of human involvement.

The change that occurs in *Typhoon* is primarily evident in Mr. Jukes and Captain MacWhirr. In *Conrad's Narrative Method*, Jakob Lothe points out that they “gradually emerge as the two main characters of the text” (Lothe, 114). He continues to emphasize their importance by claiming that:

There is a particular thematics attached to each of them; a larger and more ambiguous thematics arises from the striking contrast between these two personalities and from their divergent relations to the crew and to the typhoon with which the ship is confronted. (104)

In the early face of their interaction it is obvious that MacWhirr and Jukes do not share a common set of personality characteristics. Via the omniscient narrator's voice the reader gets a view of MacWhirr's rather dull perspective. “Mr. Jukes, in moments of expansion on shore, would proclaim loudly that “the old girl was as good as she was pretty.” It would never have occurred to Captain MacWhirr to express his favourable opinion so loud in terms so fanciful” (Conrad, 6). The contrastive relation between these two men is further established in similar underlying disputes. “It's the heat,” said Jukes. “The weather's awful. It would make a saint swear. Even up here I feel exactly as if I had my head tied up in a woollen blanket” (18). Incapable of even understanding what his first mate wanted to express with such a statement, “Captain MacWhirr expostulated against the use of images in speech” (19).

The rather ironic portrayal of MacWhirr diverges from other protagonists in the Conrad canon and critics have duly commented on this difference. In *Conrad's Early Sea Fiction*, Paul Bruss states that after having written *Heart of Darkness* and *Lord Jim*, “Conrad returns to the more rigorous navigational focus of the early sea period” (122). Conrad’s main project is still an exploration and analysis of relationships between men, but the ironic tone is not recognisable in the portrayals of for instance Marlow and Lord Jim. Captain MacWhirr is indeed a diminished character compared to the depth and versatility of other Conrad protagonists. His lack of imagination is a virtue that men such as Marlow and Lord Jim depend on. Jim’s dilemma, while he struggles to decide whether to abandon his ship or stay aboard with the passengers, is structured around his ability to imagine. Equally does Marlow’s first person voice in *Heart of Darkness*, frequently discussing the mystery of Kurtz, ascribe him imaginative capacities:

But the wilderness had found him out early, and had taken on him a terrible vengeance for the fantastic invasion. I think it had whispered to him things about himself which he did not, things of which he had no conception till he took counsel with his great solitude – and the whisper had proved irresistibly fascinating.  
(Conrad, 57-58)

In *The Shadow Line*, (1916) the novel that perhaps resembles *Typhoon* the most regarding plot and style, the protagonist becomes captain on a ship while still relatively young and inexperienced. Out at sea he faces grave challenges as close to all of his crew fall ill from fever. Without proper medicine, which he blames himself for not having checked out properly while onshore, and without sufficient wind and crew to muster any movement, he finds himself severely beaten. “I feel as if all my sins had found me out. But I suppose the trouble is that the ship is still lying motionless, not under command; and that I have nothing to do to keep my imagination from running wild amongst the disastrous images of the worst

that may befall us (*The Shadow-Line*, 87). Thus, compared to the advanced, reflective and imaginative characters that otherwise are present in Conrad's novels, Captain MacWhirr comes forth as the antithesis. He is a simple man and the omniscient narrator is unequivocal in presenting that fact. "Having just enough imagination to carry him through each successive day, and no more, he was tranquilly sure of himself; and from the very same reason he was not in the least conceited" (Conrad, *Typhoon*, 4).

It is quite obvious that *Typhoon* is substantially different from those of Conrad's widely recognised and canonised novels. Accordingly, critical attention has not only been sparse, but also seldom favourable in terms of narrative techniques and theme. It is of course understandable that the majority of criticism has been directed at Conrad's more advanced work and I agree with Bruss that Conrad's normal pattern is in fact diminished by the use of irony and humour. However, I find it somewhat unproductive to measure the qualities of *Typhoon* against novels which deal with complex themes like race, psychology and evil on a far more profound level. Since travel writing as genre is becoming increasingly eligible for critical interpretation, *Typhoon* comes forth as an important contribution to narrative methods that are being defined and discussed today.

As suggested in the introduction, it is unlikely that Conrad merely wrote a storm-piece that by chance was substantially inferior to his earlier work. In the preface to the 1921 Heinemann edition of *Typhoon and Other Tales*, Conrad gives a clue to his method:

the interest [...] was, of course, not the bad weather but the extraordinary compilation brought into the ship's life at a moment of exceptional stress by the human elements below her deck [...] I felt that to bring out its deeper significance which was quite apparent to me, something other, something more was required; a leading motive that would harmonise all these violent noises, and a point of view

that would put all that elemental fury into its proper place. What was needed of course was Captain MacWhirr. (Watts, xii)

This method provides an interesting point of departure since the author seems to be adjusting the protagonist's characteristics according to what he is about to describe. The advantages of dealing with characters in fiction rather than biographical presentations in historical narratives also become strikingly clear. However, as Jeremy Hawthorn points out in *Narrative Technique and Ideological Commitment*, *Typhoon* does not come forth as a "roman à thèse" (229) in which the characters merely illustrate certain sets of ideas. Affected by the impact caused by the storm, the characters gradually go through personal changes. This is a display of methodical nuances that require a closer reading.

In the chapters leading up to the encounter with the typhoon the reader will undoubtedly find it entertaining to read about the captain's foolish responses. In analeptic passages, presented as letters to a friend in the Western Ocean Trade, Mr. Jukes' attitude to his Captain is revealed. "Sometimes you would think he hadn't sense enough to see anything wrong. And yet it isn't that. Can't be. He has been in command for a good few years now. He doesn't do anything foolish, and gets his ship along all right without worrying anybody" (6). These analeptic sequences have a bi-level function. They break up an otherwise linear narrative and allow the reader to learn more about the characters from a perspective other than the omniscient narrator. Through these letters it gradually becomes evident what the characters around MacWhirr think of him. In Jukes' case he sees him as though he is a machine that just continues to function indifferent to the life that revolves around him. Critics have linked the characterization of Jukes to Conrad's resistance to modern seamanship. Too much was entrusted the power of steam engines and too much became forgotten of the ancient art of seamanship which disappeared when sailing vessels became rarer. On suggesting that it might be a good idea to steer away from the heavy

weather that now is visible on the horizon, Jukes is met with MacWhirr's blunt belief in modern technology. "Steer four points off... And what afterwards? Steer four points over to the other way, I suppose, to make the course good. What put it into your head that I would start to tack a steamer as if she were a sailing ship" (23)? The irony in these statements is conspicuous and accordingly, many of MacWhirr's utterances function well as modern criticism of progress.

Conrad's scepticism about modern seamanship is obvious and interesting. Incorporated in the persona of a fact-driven, stubborn captain, who serves as a consequence of an art on the wane, it functions well as a device directing the ship towards the storm. Additionally, the dialogues between MacWhirr and Jukes contribute to the image of a man who is unfamiliar with common figures of speech and human interaction. Jukes is the imaginative character who renders MacWhirr featureless and inflexible. However, it is the typhoon which eventually has the power to create any real alternations in the mind and souls of the characters. When the captain meets the typhoon for the first time the reader also has an image of him being emotionally detached. In the analeptic passages where the reader is informed about the correspondence with his family at home this indifference is striking:

And Captain MacWhirr wrote home from the coast of China twelve times every year, desiring queerly to be "remembered to the children," and subscribing himself "your loving husband," as calmly as if the words so long used by so many men were, apart from their shape, worn-out things, and of a faded meaning. (11)

Naturally, a lifetime at sea will create a distance from family and loved ones at home, but there is a sense of selectiveness in how MacWhirr has dealt with this distance. He ran away to sea relatively early and had sustained in an equal relationship with his parents and relatives. It is thus not his chosen wife and offspring he replies to in this manner, but his

whole family which, for most people, it is possible to keep emotionally attached to. The reason for him to develop this seemingly indifferent attitude is not an issue in the narrative. However, the following passage offers an explanation, but keeps the mystery of MacWhirr's personality well hidden:

The sea itself, as if sharing Mr. Jukes' good-natured forbearance, had never put itself out to startle the silent man [...] 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. There are on sea and land such men thus fortunate – or thus disdained by destiny or by the sea. (14)

He has never experienced rough sea, a characteristic which clearly, for reasons unknown, resonances in the way he leads his emotional life. He is as such disdained by both destiny and by the sea. Thus, MacWhirr is a character who has, assumedly from never being properly challenged, had the opportunity to develop a persona with such flat characteristics. As I have commented, Conrad stated that in order to put all the elemental fury into its proper place he added MacWhirr. In *Joseph Conrad: The Way of Dispossession*, H.M Daleski draws attention to the Conradian *test* in order to explain the function of MacWhirr. Daleski argues that “The Knitting machine that knits men in and knits men out, we perceive, is not without its own artifices – and ultimately does not ‘disdain’ Captain MacWhirr” (105). Given the casualty and ruthlessness of nature, the Conradian test in *Typhoon* is thus the test of emotional indifference meeting nature's indifference. As we learn, MacWhirr passes the test that Conrad subjects him to.

The storm itself is presented in a highly visual language. In *Joseph Conrad and the Fiction of Autobiography*, Edward Said argues that “As a writer, Conrad's job was to make

intellectual use of what he had known, and “use,” in this Jamesian employment of the term, means rendering, making overt” (Said, 7). In this context, rendering seems to imply descriptions of the element as it is experienced without exaggerating or applying artistic remarks. Unavoidably, this approach relies on cumulated knowledge and experiences of the subject who is narrating the story, which in this case is the authorial voice in *Typhoon*. The simple, stringent and visual language in which the storm is presented, by a skilled mariner and author like Joseph Conrad, brings the notion that simplicity serves its purpose well in this narrative strikingly to mind.

There are few examples of personification that to any degree threaten to overshadow the focus on the human drama. The storm is presented in a physical manner and experienced through the consciousness of the characters or the omniscient narrator. Yet, in some of the similes, a device which Conrad frequently uses in *Typhoon*, there are examples of personification that assumedly play an important part with a view to the reader’s associative register:

From the first stir of the air felt on his cheek the gale seemed to take upon itself the accumulated impetus of an avalanche. Heavy sprays enveloped the Nan-Shan from stem to stern, and instantly in the midst of her regular rolling she began to jerk and plunge as though she had gone mad with fright. (29)

The passage is as subtle as it is overwhelming. It stretches from a slightly noticeable physical sensation to the image of debris of falling ice and snow, in one sentence. The contrastive image represents the suddenness of the chaos that the crew are about to enter. The fear that is looming in the waves is effectively foreshadowed by the personified ‘fear’ of the ship. From here the action takes an even more dramatic turn as, “The darkness palpitated down upon all this, and then the real thing came at last” (30). This sentence is



extremely dense and highly charged. It is easy to imagine that some writers would use far more extended phrases in order to depict this vast drama. It is a brilliant example of Conrad's preference for rendering rather than creating an imagery which leaves little to be visualized by the reader. This short sentence presents the essence of what the crew aboard the *Nan-Shan* experience at that moment, which, without any superfluous language, leaves the reader to his or hers own imaginative skills. Such language also places *Typhoon* firmly in the category of modernist narratives.

This style is characteristic of the narrative throughout, particularly in the chapters where the ship has entered the typhoon. The attention lingers on the physical experience, while the reader is left to know only a minimum of conscious thought. It is as though the narrative style attempts to mirror the events that are depicted:

Everything disappeared – even, for a moment, his power of thinking; but his hand had found one of the rail-stanchions.[...] All the time he was being tossed, flung, and rolled in great volumes of water, he kept on repeating mentally, with the utmost precipitation, the words: ‘My God! My God! My God! My God!’ (30-31)

The omission of an elaborate description of thoughts is probably a very conscious choice on Conrad's part. Obviously, as Jukes' power of thinking disappears it would be incoherent if the narrator continued with Jukes' internal monologues. However, this apparent cause and action feature does not keep many writers from doing the exact opposite, a feature which often leaves an impression of a hyperbolic style. Conrad's method of keeping the narrative as close as possible to how it is perceived by a character in an actual setting implies that if Mr. Jukes' mental capabilities are set under considerable stress and cease to function, this change will be reflected in the narrative.

The notion of writing things as they are perceived is evident in another example of personification which distinguishes this particular variant of extreme nature from other kinds. As the storm washes in over the ship we learn of its characteristics that:

It was something formidable and swift, like the sudden smashing of a vial wrath. [...] In an instant the men lost touch of each other. This is the disintegrating power of a great wind: it isolates one from one's kind. An earthquake, a landslip, an avalanche, overtakes a man incidentally, as it were – without passion. A furious gale attacks him like a personal enemy, tries to grasp his limbs, fasten upon his mind, seeks to rout his very spirit out of him. (30)

It is presumably the authorial narrator who expresses this notion of the winds characteristics and for anybody familiar to the sensation of fighting a great wind this description might give an association that the author wants to produce. The use of personification is obvious as the wind here is given abilities that ascribe to something beastly or perhaps even diabolical. Conversely, other forms of extreme nature are described as to be 'without passion,' implying that the wind is in fact passionate. The use of 'passion' in this context can be interpreted as the authorial voice's subjective relation to the wind at sea. Conrad has undoubtedly developed a profound relationship to the element of the sea and all its meteorological conditions. On the other hand, a person who has experienced an avalanche or an earthquake might emerge from it having perceived the upheavals equally strongly. Realism is as such dependent on a subjective relation to the element, which makes it even more important to exercise modesty when treating the features of violent nature in fictional narratives. In a make-belief environment it might be tempting to upscale certain elements in order to give an impetus to the action. With this brief reference to the wind as negatively passionate, Conrad does not exceed the limits of descriptions or similes that are hyperbolic. It is a conveyance of his twenty years of experience at sea which functions

well in contrast with the strictly impassionate MacWhirr. Further, even though the weather itself is not the interest, it nevertheless becomes interesting as it is the cause of the psychological effect that happens when exposed to it. Thus, these passages, introducing the influential force of the typhoon to the reader, foreshadow the kind of rebirth that takes place in *Typhoon* as it “seeks to rout the very spirit out of him” (30).

While the storm is rampaging it becomes obvious that the young, inexperienced Jukes is lacking the ability to fender off the passion of the wind. His imagination soon leads him to the conclusion that he is in mortal danger. Gradually, this fear is replaced by an undeterminable indifference. “He was not scared; he knew this because, firmly believing he would never see another sunrise, he remained calm in that belief” (37). For the reader who is unfamiliar with great winds at sea, this attitude might come as a surprise. A logical reasoning would be to fight against the powers that cause the fear, but as we learn, “It was rather like a forced-on numbness of spirit. The long, long stress of a gale does it; the suspense of the interminably culminating catastrophe; and there is a bodily fatigue in the mere holding on to existence within the excessive tumult” (37). This is another example of Conrad’s fine use of realism in fiction. Instead of accelerating the level of action, which would otherwise increase the suspense, he incapacitates his character by mere knowledge about human reaction patterns in a given situation. I imagine that a text like *Typhoon* would cause a row of dilemmas for a scriptwriter. Even though the language is remarkably visual, it would have been difficult to adapt many of the scenes to a functional screenplay. The impressionist aspects of the effects of the storm rely heavily on the reader’s imagination. Thus, an interesting adaptation to film could perhaps belong in the line of work by directors such as Mike Nichols or David Lynch?

Since MacWhirr is incapable of imagining how the powers of a hurricane work, he comes unprepared to the mental challenge. In this state, which seems to be the paradoxical

strength on his behalf, he gains control after the first violent encounter with the hurricane. He continues to shout out commands to his crew who are tremendously frightened and, including Jukes, incapacitated. With water flooding violently over them and the wind howling incessantly they have vast difficulties finding each other. MacWhirr and Jukes accidentally bump into each other whereon the Captain shouts at his first mate. The response accords with Jukes' mental state. "He had to answer that voice that would not be silenced. He answered in the customary manner: "...Yes, sir." And directly his heart, corrupted by the storm that breeds a craving for peace, rebelled against the tyranny of training and command" (39). At this point the thorough order of the crew's duties and their discipline seem vaporized, as if gone overboard with the heavy cascades of water flowing over them. The captain, on the other hand, lingers in his role. He shouts to Jukes, "...Says...whole lot...fetched away...Ought to see...what's the matter" (43). The use of direct speech is another device which complies with Conrad's idea of rendering. Accordingly, the intervention in the fragmented dialogue between Jukes and MacWhirr spur the reader's imagination since it is difficult to remain indifferent to such a vivid display of communication muted by the wind.

Meanwhile, the human cargo below deck is fighting for their lives and their money, both being tossed around by the force of the waves. Upon receiving the news about the tumults, Captain MacWhirr decides that it has to be sorted out. Mr. Jukes, who has surrendered to his own indifference and impending death, is given the mission. He opposes the command, but MacWhirr, still incapable of imagining the worst, encourages him. "Don't want...you get lost...so long...ship isn't...Rout...Good man...Ship...may...through this...all right yet." All at once Jukes understood he would have to go. "Do you think she may?" he screamed" (43). At this revelation, the change that transforms these two characters is at a turning point. MacWhirr recognizes Jukes need for

positive leadership as he can imagine what the young sailor has set his mind on. Jukes, on the other hand, regains hope of surviving by the word of his captain. He realises that he needs to obey the command that he is given in order to save himself.

Mr. Jukes manages to calm down the fighting among the coolies, but they are severely battered. “Somebody in there moaned with pain, and somebody else could be seen crouching over what seemed the prone body of a dead man; a lusty voice blasphemed; and the glow under each fire-door was like a pool of flaming blood radiating quietly in a velvet blackness” (53). At this time the ship has sailed into the eye of the hurricane and the violent inferno outside has ceased. However, just as the imagery of ‘flaming blood’ and ‘velvet blackness’ suggests the darkness that prevails, MacWhirr’s imagination revolves around what lies ahead:

The worst was to come, then – and if the books were right this worst would be very bad. The experience of the last six hours had enlarged his conception of what heavy weather would be like. “It’ll be terrific,” he pronounced mentally. [...] He was glad the trouble in the ‘tween-deck had been discovered in time. If the ship had to go after all, then, at least, she wouldn’t be going down to the bottom with a lot of people in her fighting teeth and claw. That would have been odious. And in that feeling there was a humane intention and a vague sense of the fitness of things. (61)

This reasoning represents the changes in MacWhirr which occur during the first phase of the typhoon. First, he has now gained the experience enabling him to imagine the impending ordeal that is waiting as soon as they leave the eye of the typhoon. Second, his attitude towards the coolies has changed from seeing them merely as cargo, to considering them as a subject which rouses a ‘feeling of humane intention’. As a suggestion to what lies behind this change, the reader learns that “The storm penetrated the defences of the man

and unsealed his lips. He spoke out in the solitude and the pitch darkness of the cabin, as if addressing another being awakened within his breast. ‘I shouldn’t like to lose her, ‘ he said half aloud” (62). His newly gained perspective is further established by a repetition of his worry, which also concludes the reader’s journey through the third phase of the hurricane. “Before the renewed wrath of winds swooped on his ship, Captain MacWhirr was moved to declare, in a tone of vexation, as it were: “I wouldn’t like to lose her” (65). Then the omniscient narrator laconically declares, “He was spared that annoyance” (65). From this point on the narrative moves into an ellipsis which provides a dramatic contrast to the preceding upheavals. “On a bright sunshiny day, with the breeze chasing her smoke far ahead, the Nan-Shan came into Fu-chau” (66). In this duration device, there is a vast modal distance between the suspense that has been built up during the typhoon and the sudden display of harmony and an apparently uneventful passage. The cliché-like depiction of the ship embarking its destination marks the turn that also emphasize that the weather is of no further importance to the narrative.

In the concluding sixth chapter, the change in MacWhirr is documented as the letters reoccur as analeptic passages. Mrs. MacWhirr skims through the letter in which her husband describes the event. In her yearlong training in expecting the content of these letters she fails to notice a considerable change in emotional confession. “She would have found it recorded there that between 4 and 6 A.M. on December 25<sup>th</sup>, Captain MacWhirr did actually think that his ship could not possibly live another hour in the sea, and that he would never see his wife and children again” (68). The encounter with the typhoon seems to have opened up a new register of emotional attachment. Accordingly, MacWhirr has passed the test that Conrad subjected him to. Of course, in advance of this event the fact-oriented, unimaginative MacWhirr was blind to the notion of being in the peril of his life. Not only did the prospect of being lost to his family open up his eyes, but with a view to

how he handled the situation with the coolies, his indifference seems to have been transformed into empathy.

The chief engineer, Solomon Rout, writes to his family that MacWhirr “has done something rather clever” (69). However, his son, while reading the letter, is disappointed to find that “He doesn’t say what it is. Says I couldn’t understand how much there was in it” (70). Further, Mr. Jukes recapitulates the whole event in a letter to his friend in the Western Ocean trade. By intervening in the fight amongst the coolies, their money, the reason for the fighting, was taken away from them. To the bewilderment of his crew, who took it for granted that the Chinese would attack them if they were let out, MacWhirr released them from their storage room below deck. “He reckoned he would be doing the fair thing by them as near as possible if he shared all the cash we had picked up equally among the lot” (73), comments Mr. Jukes. The coolies had practically no legal protection, and there were other, more violent options available, but among these, MacWhirr chooses the most humane and fair settlement. As a response to these actions Jukes comments that “The old chief says that this was plainly the only thing that could be done” (74). Seeing that there were other, more violent methods that would solve this problem, it is clear that the view of the captain, who, awakened by the hurricane, wanted to settle this quietly, had gained ground and convinced his crew. Compared to the general assumption that he was a dumb, dull and uncreative figure, he now had a renewed trust as captain. Jukes’ final comment, which also concludes the narrative, reveals a self awareness on MacWhirr’s behalf. “The skipper remarked to me the other day, ‘There are things you find nothing about in books,’ I think that he got out of it very well for such a stupid man” (74). The statement marks the new MacWhirr, who from here on has to consider his intuition and ability to imagine a certain outcome in his profession and his life. The young Jukes admits to his friend that he now has something to learn from his captain, something indefinable that goes beyond

theory. Thus, it is undisputable that the thematics of *Typhoon* revolves around aspects of personal change. With basis in his creative imagination, Conrad has used the immense powers of a typhoon in order to induce change in seemingly non-imaginative and imaginative characters. There is a vast contrast emerging when the old captain has his personality turned around in the matter of one single night while spending most his life being the un-imaginative person he was. Simultaneously, the young Mr. Jukes will probably carry with him his new perspectives throughout his life. The extreme nature thus marks the break and opening of the strong power of personality in man. This ability to shake and form human minds was probably what Conrad had in mind when he wanted to demonstrate the proper proportions of a great wind.

To summarise the observations made in chapter two, *Typhoon* was written when European colonisation was at its height. In the beginning of this period, travel narratives were primarily accounts from far off corners of the world, often with didactical or instructional purposes in mind. In the late nineteenth century industrialisation and technology had opened up for travelling as a leisure activity for people who could afford it. Most of the authors who wrote travel narratives were, however, affiliated with the work in the expanding colonies or linked to aspects of trade with the colonies. Such was the case with Conrad who until 1897 was working with French, Belgian and British merchant fleets. The literary trends at this time, which eventually established the modernist period, enabled writers to experiment with impressionist devices in their writing. Accordingly, fiction gradually emerged in the traditionally non-fictional genre of travel writing. Until the late 1970s, texts such as *Typhoon* has received little critical attention, mainly because it was considered an underachievement compared to other works in the Conrad canon. However, new critical theory and radical changes in recent travel writing contribute to the interest in looking at this text in a new interpretative light.



According to Conrad himself, his primary interest in writing *Typhoon* was not to give particular attention to weather as a phenomenon. Moreover, to explore the impact the violent storm had on human minds and how they interacted in a life-threatening situation. Thus, the typhoon is the methodical device that causes the thematic change and, albeit elusively, renders Captain MacWhirr and Mr. Jukes their new perspectives. The captain and his young first mate gradually emerge as the two main characters who are being challenged by the unexpected powers of the great wind. There is no doubt that the origin of the story can be ascribed to knowledge about the sea and its various meteorological features. Without claiming that *Typhoon* is autobiographical, there is, as Jakob Lothe has suggested, a distinctly authorial voice in a narrative such as *Typhoon*. Functioning as an omniscient narrator in the narrative, there is no doubt that the narrator has a strong and personal connection to the sea. This feature is most evident in passages which describe the sea and the wind by the use of personification. The omniscient narrator is the main speaker throughout the novel and for the majority of his narration the language is laconic and direct. These features enhance the impression of an experienced narrator. Further, in chapters describing the ship's journey through the typhoon, the extreme is portrayed in a dense and highly charged language. The sentence, "Then the darkness palpitated down upon all this and the real thing came at last" (30), is only one out of many examples that verify this observation. The evocative effects and associative aspects that emerge from such language create a considerable suspense and a contrast to the dull character MacWhirr.

Dialogues and monologues are generally narrated in the third person, either as direct speech or as glimpses of third person's consciousness. The latter is particularly predominant in analeptic temporal order devices which are letters to characters who are not aboard the ship. These letters break up an otherwise linear narrative and give the reader information about the characters from a perspective other than the omniscient narrator. This

is a clever device since the reader learns that this is how he is perceived from the people around him. If the omniscient narrator would have given all the information, *Typhoon* could appear more like a thesis for the exploration of an idea. Thus, these analepses give the characters realistic shapes such as when Jukes is telling about his eccentric and factual captain to his friend in letters, or when the reader learns about the reaction to MacWhirrs letters from the view of his wife.

Considering duration, there is a conspicuous ellipsis occurring between chapters five and six as the captain and his crew are preparing to re-enter the typhoon. The reader learns nothing of this experience other than that MacWhirr was 'spared the annoyance' of losing his ship. Then there is a leap in time to the next morning when they are embarking Fu-chau in a highly contrastive calm weather. The sudden change of weather seems to be parallel to the personal change in MacWhirr. He is now able to look beyond facts and treat his 'cargo' as what they essentially are: human beings.

*Typhoon* is first a display of human psyche set under severe stress when encountering a typhoon in the China Sea. During these events Captain MacWhirr and Jukes both experience a change that respectively 'roots' them out of their persona. The young first mate has decided that there is little to learn from a dumb folded, stubborn man like MacWhirr. The reader is made aware of this attitude through the letters. However, as he is pacified by the hurricane threatening to take his life, he discovers real leadership in his captain who chooses, both literally and figuratively, to face the hurricane. MacWhirr is lacking the ability to imagine the worst possible scenario as he has neither the experience of violent seas nor the imagination to seeing himself losing his life. He has, from reasons unknown, developed an emotional detachment which makes him seem indifferent to the life revolving him. During and after the typhoon this indifference is being tested by the random and powerful violent winds. It becomes clear that these upheavals gradually changes his

personality. MacWhirr has discovered that he is not invulnerable and that sometimes problems are solved with intuition and imagination, rather than by employing a theoretical approach. Jukes, who is rendered so engulfed by fear that he is overtaken by apathy, matures when he experiences that he is given hope to survive by his captain.

These recapitulations of psychological changes survey the essence of the theme in *Typhoon*. In a broader view, it is evident that Conrad wanted to issue a warning against developments that had occurred in the marine world during the transition to technological modernisation. Too much of the security for personnel and cargo were entrusted steam engines and boat building technology on behalf of the ancient art of seamanship. When the *Titanic* encountered the famed ice-berg in 1912, Conrad wrote two essays which actualise the warnings which he incorporated in his fictional narratives. I elaborate on this topic in chapter three.

*Typhoon* is a relatively simple story which is easy to comprehend. And yet, considered as an example of early modern fictional travel writing and with a view to its method, there are reasons to claim that it represents a profound understanding of the narration of the extreme. The manner in which it is written suggests that Conrad's intention was not primarily to venture too deep into the psyche of his characters. However, their own views, represented in letters, give leverage to more versatile character portrayals. The typhoon is vividly depicted as its features are reproduced in a dense and highly charged language. Further, the laconic language and elliptical passages contribute to an enhancement of the devastating forces of the wind. In sum, the narrative methods which are evident in *Typhoon* are evocative and descriptive of extreme weather in a manner which many readers would expect it to be. One does not feel compelled to question why these characters have experienced a change, perhaps particularly MacWhirr. Thus, it becomes

obvious what the ‘sinister violence of intention’ is in the mind of Conrad: To remind the reader of a force that has the power to change lives and possibly save them.

Conrad’s testing of characters in *Typhoon* is a fictional display of a life-changing journey. This thematics, the geographical connotations of the typhoon and the link to colonial trade, are features which provide Conrad’s sea-narrative with links to travel writing as we consider it today. In the next chapter, in which I will discuss Jon Krakauer’s non-fictional account, the thematics is built around the tradition of self-testing. In thin air, and unfortunately accompanied by deadly winds, it tells a story of why some of us do not pass the test of extreme nature. Furthermore, narrated as a journey to Mount Everest, and discussing the motives of an expanding commercial trekking industry, this account fits under the category of travel writing too.

### **Chapter Three: *Into Thin Air* - Beyond Rescue**

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Under the parole that practically everybody with reasonable physical abilities can reach the roof of the world, international adventure companies have brought tourism to a zone earlier reserved for experienced mountaineers and climbers. Jon Krakauer went to Everest in order to observe this growing industry, but in the death zone above twenty five thousand feet the climbers encountered a fatal storm which initiated a fight for their lives. In a state of disintegration from each other comparable to that experienced by the crew aboard the *Nan-Shan* facing the storm, there are certain narrative aspects that link these two writers to each other. Even though the narratives are separated by genre and historic context they resemble each other by a realistic display of human reactions to life-threatening situations. Krakauer has also written a relatively simple narrative where the method is considerably more interesting than linguistic concerns would lead one to expect.

In this chapter I will consider narration in *Into Thin Air* in light of the techniques that Conrad utilised in his storm narrative. There is no doubt that Conrad continues to inspire and influence many writers, but considering the shifts in literary currencies and critical foci over the last century, these influences inevitably become vague and incoherent. Moreover, as indicated already, I have had to consider the generic difference between the primary sources. A non-fictional narrative has to be developed in accordance with actual events where characters and plot are indefinable structures. A fictional narrative is dependent on the author's ability to create events in which he or she defines characters and plot for the purpose of the development of the action. Accordingly, literary devices, narrative techniques and other aspects of the art of writing obviously favour fictional narratives. Thus, it is not my aim to juxtapose Conrad and Krakauer in terms of artistic skills or in any other manner point to such similarities in their language. I have, however,

made a few comments on these discrepancies where I believe it is relevant to the discussion of narrative method.

As already discussed in chapter two, Conrad's interest lies not in the weather phenomenon itself; there is a more profound intention behind his descriptions of human interplay between man and nature. In order to present this idea there is evidence that he deliberately diminished and simplified the narrative, leaving the reader, along with the characters of *Typhoon*, puzzled by what really happened during the course of events. With little information about the characters and in combination with a dense and highly charged language, much is left to the reader's own imagination. It is the ability to think beyond the written word and comprehend the intended associations in words that eventually animate the characters and events in the mind of the reader. On the contrary, Krakauer has not left much to chance in *Into Thin Air*. This choice is supposedly wise since he then would have run the risk of compromising the non-fiction format. And yet, reading these narratives there is a notable similarity in the approach to travel writing. Krakauer and Conrad are both possessed of a thorough knowledge of what they are writing about. While Conrad spent twenty years of his professional life at sea, Krakauer has spent most of his adult life as a professional climber and mountaineer. In their respective environments they have learnt the effects of violent nature and how to draw on this knowledge in their writing. Thus, being well aware of the generic differences that separate *Typhoon* and *Into Thin Air*, my aim is to point to how Conrad's and Krakauer's narration resemble each other. Furthermore, is it possible to find clearly defined connections between the method of non-fictional and fictional travel narratives in where extreme nature is the decisive feature?

Today, there are no indication of a decline in the interest for writing that concerns venturing into the unknown. A quick glance in bookstores reveals an increasing interest in writers who travel. There are designated sections with signs indicating which part of the

world the journeys take place along with references to theme and ad-hoc areas of interests. As a result of the growing interest in travel literature and its considerable interpretative potential, literary studies has recently established this type of literature as an area of research. One of the most popular categories within non-fictional travel literature is texts that are based on exploration in war zones, or “contact zones” (4) as coined by Mary Louise Pratt in her influential *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*. Ethnic conflicts in ex-Yugoslavia, Afghanistan, The Middle East, Iraq and recent conflicts in African countries are examples of contemporary research sources. Writers or journalists have written international bestsellers based on more or less successful accounts of life and culture in these areas. They have in common that they are allegedly historical narratives and as such give a truthful glimpse into a world that is too dangerous, or too demanding to enter for typical holidaymakers. On behalf of nature, *Into Thin Air* represents one of the contact zones of today as it describes a clash of cultures and personalities in one of the most hostile areas of the world.

Paul Theroux, Peter Mathiessen and Bruce Chatwin are all pioneers within the tradition of travel accounts in which, often using a pseudonym, they are the first-person narrator. In the late seventies they all published titles that, according to Peter Hulme, more or less marked a shift of aesthetics and method in contemporary travel writing. Writing of Bruce Chatwin’s *In Patagonia*, Hulme notes that “the book’s laconic and elliptical style, its ninety-seven shorts sections averaging little more than a couple of pages each, seemed finally to bring a modernist aesthetics to a fundamentally nineteenth-century genre” (Hulme, 91). As modern information technology developed, and people of all levels of society became able to travel themselves, these writers were met with new demands for documentation and validation of sources. In academic circles, the development of formalism and structuralism had formed the basis of an increasing interest in the text’s

separation from its author and history. In the wane of such literary trends, travel writing gradually became eligible for academic interpretation. Since there is reason to believe that documented facts in their narratives were questionable, it is tempting to deduct that when fiction become accepted as a part of historic narratives, it increases its aesthetic value. Considering *Typhoon* from this perspective of contemporary literary discourse, it is thus far ahead of its time as it is indeed 'laconic and elliptical in style'. Moreover, as I commented in chapter two, the novel has many other features in common with modernist literature. However, for media and the common consumer of literature the main interest remains whether they are deceived or not. Allegedly, in defence of such allegations Bruce Chatwin's biographer, Nicholas Shakespeare, once quipped that 'he [Chatwin] tells not a half truth, but a truth and a half'.

It is of course an enormous, if not to say impossible task to verify the facts that are presented in travel narratives. Accordingly, many writers make a great effort to prove that their stories are accurate and trustworthy. Jon Krakauer's *Into Thin Air* is an example of a text where documentation and reliance on facts are meticulously emphasised. Verifying of sources and background information blends in with the tale and amounts to a considerable number of pages. The natural reflexes of a skilled journalist obviously contribute to this methodical approach, but the market for this type of literature assumedly plays an important part as well. Recent debates in the media show that once an author becomes suspected of falsifying information or otherwise use devices that do not comply with the truth, their work is rendered less valuable in terms of sales numbers. Being the object that often matters the most for the publisher, they will assumedly encourage writers to be consistent on behalf of documentation rather than aesthetical concerns. Whether or not this has been an actual dilemma for Krakauer is difficult to say, but the aesthetics of *Into Thin Air* is nevertheless not its strength. From a theoretical point of view this suggests that the



narrative is in accordance with aspects of its generic distinction. A disaster with heavy media coverage and many eye-witnesses would in any case hardly have been accepted in a format that diverges from non-fiction. Thus, considering the art of writing, Krakauer's narrative is qualitatively inferior to Conrad, but keeping within the generic boundaries of non-fictional literature, the language does not to any degree hinder a well organised and consistent narrative.

The layout of *Into Thin Air* is exceedingly classical compared to traditional travel accounts. The opening pages include a survey over all expeditions and their members operating at the same time and a map indicating the route from Base Camp to the summit. In the mid-section of the book there is a display of photos which show parts of the climb and a few of the guides and climbers who died. Of course, these photos are good validations for an account. They also contribute to the reading experience as real images and faces replace the images the reader might have been creating through literal descriptions. Personally, it was fascinating to have a prejudicial image of the expedition leader Rob Hall as a tall, wide-shouldered, furrowed man, only to realise that he had a rather boyish appearance, despite his rather impressive adventurer's beard. Nevertheless, in a narrative where the characters are very central, it functions well to concretise some of the characters and places by their and its actual appearance. An even more effective contribution to the enhancement of imagery is Randy Rackliff's illustrations at the beginning of each chapter. Presented in black and white, they are dark and dramatic and the woodcut technique brings out a gloomy and strained expression in the faces of the climbers. Thus, in a narrative that in writing is limited by generic conventions these illustrations convey much of the aesthetic dimension that otherwise has to be receded. In comparison to Conrad, who is a master in the conceptualisation of darkness in language, the illustrations in *Into Thin Air* achieve a similar effect.

The main title and subtitle, '*Into Thin Air - A Personal Account of the Mt. Everest Disaster*', give the reader an overview of what to expect of the narrative. The elusiveness of the main title becomes neutralised by the subtitle, which in contrast is very informative. Krakauer states that this is a personal account and thus makes an agreement with the reader that this is how he has experienced it. Similar to the word 'typhoon', 'Mount Everest' immediately evokes associations to the unknown and to the extreme. It also gives the exact geographical position where the action takes place. When it occurred, this incident was well covered by the world press. It is not unusual that such disasters attract much attention when they strike expeditions that have recruited members from numerous nationalities. In December 2008, eleven expedition members, the Norwegian climber Rolf Bae among them, lost their lives during a descent from the world's second highest mountain, K2, which is more technically challenging to climb than Everest. These were experienced climbers renowned in their respective countries. The parallels to the plot in Krakauer's account are obvious and I assume that this recent disaster will yield various titles in various languages each telling their own story.<sup>2</sup> The media attention directed at the Himalayan Range in 1996 is the reason why Krakauer can refer to his account as being 'the Mt. Everest Disaster' rather than using the random determinant. A feature of contemporary non-fictional travel writing is thus that authors and publishers can to a greater degree assume that the readers are more or less familiar with location and parts of the story.

This feature is probably why *Into Thin Air* opens with a sequence which resembles prolepsis. This sequence surveys the complete story over the first five pages, and point forward to the fatal outcome of the expedition. A similar temporal device is evident in Thornton Wilder's fictional narrative *The Bridge of San Luis Rey* (1927). The first sentence of the novel depicts five person's fall from the collapsing bridge to their certain death in the

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<sup>2</sup> On 24 March 2009, Cecilia Skog, co-participant on the K2 expedition and wife of Rolf Bae, announced that she had commenced an account of their fatal climb.

gulf below. The novel continues by recapitulating the lives of these five in order to explain *why* they died. As Jakob Lothe asserts “the sentence functions proleptically: as we know the whole time what is going to happen to the five characters, we interpret what we learn about them in the light of this knowledge” (*Narrative in Fiction and Film*, 56). However, before I continue the discussion of narration in *Into Thin Air*, I find it timely to repeat my concern for using interpretative tools which we normally ascribe to fictional narratives. It is obviously problematic to claim that Krakauer is making use of anachrony as he is accounting for something that has actually happened. Accordingly, he is not narrating the story in the same manner as if the expedition to Everest would have been written as fictional prose. Therefore I wish to emphasise that in the discussion where I refer to terms normally used in connection with the interpretation of fiction, I refer to resembling qualities which are not to be understood as parallel to fiction.

The first sentences of *Into Thin Air* are in media res depicting the first person narrator’s view from the top of Mt. Everest. “Straddling the top of the world, one foot in China and the other in Nepal, I cleared the ice from my oxygen mask, and stared absently down at the vastness of Tibet” (Krakauer, 7 ). In the succeeding recapitulation of the beginning of Krakauer’s descent, a laconic attitude appears which will linger throughout his narrative. Simultaneously he frames the degree of seriousness in the fact that people will die and thereby eliminates any doubt of the outcome of the disaster:

At 29,028 feet up in the troposphere, so little oxygen was reaching my brain that my mental capacity was that of a slow child. Under the circumstances, I was incapable of feeling much of anything except cold and tired. [...] Later – after six bodies had been located, after a search for two others had been abandoned, after surgeons had amputated the gangrenous right hand of my teammate Beck Weathers – people

would ask why, if the weather had begun to deteriorate, had climbers on the upper mountain not heeded the signs? (8)

As a response to this question, which can be interpreted as one of the major motivations for writing the account, Krakauer concludes the prolepsis by reminding the reader that he or she will know what the climbers will gradually move towards. “None of them imagined that a horrible ordeal was drawing nigh. Nobody suspected that by the end of that long day, every minute would matter (11). Thus, the opening is indeed very evocative as the outcome of the ordeal is known to the reader already from the beginning. The laconic narrative style in combination with the authorial focus on the human drama leads to the conclusion that, as in *Typhoon*, the interest is not the weather or the suspense per se, but the characters who are forced to interact and fight for their lives in the realm of violent nature.

After the introduction Krakauer opens by recapitulating the history of more or less organised expeditions to Mt. Everest. In sequences of varying lengths the reader is introduced to the development which has resulted in the trekking industry’s status quo. The historical information is supplemented by quotes from earlier Everest narratives in the openings of each chapter. Krakauer is not inclined to elaborate on possible epiphanies of philosophical or contemplative character. Similar to the function of the illustrations, he seems to be relying on writers of earlier adventure narratives to comment on such issues in these quotes. “Once on the mountain I knew (or trusted) that this would give way to total absorption with the task at hand. But at times I wondered if I had not come a long way only to find that what I really sought was something I had left behind” (Hornbein in Krakauer, 43). This might be a defining expression for Krakauer himself, or an expression that he believes is a common feature for all who allow themselves to dwell on what they are about to accomplish. Regardless, he is not voicing such observations, which otherwise seems to be a recurring theme in adventure narratives. Krakauer partly reveals the reason for this by

claiming that “Although I’d ascended hundreds of mountains, Everest was so different from anything I’d previously climbed that my powers of imagination were insufficient for the task” (49). That would at least explain why there are few lengthy passages that are inward monologues focused on other issues than merely practical ones. Additionally, it is reminiscent of MacWhirr’s change of persona in *Typhoon*. The power of imagination is in a position where it will be rebuilt and the challenge for the author will from hereon be to guide the reader through the transition. Without making clear comparisons it establishes an interesting resemblance. The problem in *Into Thin Air*, however, is not the lack of imagination as characterisation, but the decline of imagination as an asset in order to survive when exposed to thin air. In *Typhoon*, MacWhirr’s inability to imagine the devastating nature of this type of weather, foreshadows the ordeal and is the reason why he steers the *Nan-Shan* through it. His lack of imagination thus becomes the motivation for the reader to foresee the approaching disaster. In the opening pages of *Into Thin Air* the reader has already been given a rough outline of the disaster and can therefore deduct what the narrator’s power of imagination fails to tell him. Functioning as a prolepsis, the opening of *Into Thin Air* thus becomes very significant for the narrative as it establishes the reader’s interest in why these people died and how it was possible. Yet in a different manner it is evident that both Conrad and Krakauer have drawn on aspects that ultimately relate to the reader’s own imagination. In *Typhoon*, the reader is compelled to find out how MacWhirr has become who he is and in which manner the storm induces change. *Into Thin Air* is on the contrary very thorough in describing the characters that are involved and what is happening in the course of events. Forwarded by the opening, which basically recapitulates the complete narrative, the reader’s interest is evoked by asking why and how the tragedy happened. Accordingly, one is triggered to figure this out.

In addition to Everest history there are sequences which inform the reader about the background of central expedition members. Regarding method, these sequences resemble analepsis which in addition to giving information break up an otherwise linear story. In chapter two I commented that the letters had a similar function in *Typhoon*. However, where these letters are integral parts of the narrative, the sequences in *Into Thin Air* are expressive entities apart from the action that drives the plot forward. The aim of this method is presumably similar in the two narratives: to learn more about a character from a perspective apart from the action itself. Conrad's fictional narrative however, with its omniscient narrator, seems to be having the advantage of making the analeptic sequences wander in and out of the action more easily. The soft transitions from letters to action in *Typhoon* therefore serves as an example where this method preserves the aesthetic dimension far more elegantly in the genre of fiction. In contrast, Krakauer had to develop the method of *Into Thin Air* in a manner that reassured the reader that this is a trustworthy narrative. The authorial voice is accordingly the sole narrator in these sequences.

The beauty of nature and various degrees of metaphysical experiences are recurrent themes in both fictional and non-fictional travel narratives. As Krakauer's team ventures towards Everest in one of the most astonishing and untamed landscapes of the world, one would normally expect depictions that to some degree regard nature in a favourable manner. On the contrary, Krakauer largely denies himself that pleasure as his intent is, presumably, not to please the reader either:

Unburdened and unhurried, caught up in the simple joy of walking in exotic country, I fell into a kind of trance – but the euphoria seldom lasted for long. Sooner or later I'd remember where I was headed, and the shadow Everest cast across my mind would snap me back to attention. (51)

He does not indulge in other things than the grave challenge which lies ahead, and along with him, the reader is snapped back to attention too. Either because he declines any interest in philosophical contemplation on nature, or because he realises his own limitations concerning style and poetic vision that this writing requires, this direct, laconic style is consistent throughout the narrative. Subtly, through the words of a fellow climber, he gives a clue to this approach:

I distrust summaries, any kind of gliding through time, any too great a claim that one is in control of what one recounts; I think someone who claims to understand but is obviously calm, someone who claims to write with emotion recollected in tranquillity, is a fool and a liar. To understand is to tremble. To recollect is to re-enter and be riven....I admire the authority of being on one's knees in front of the event. (Harold Brodkey in Krakauer, 227)

If the aim was to 're-enter and be riven,' it seems likely that Krakauer has exposed himself to this technique. This is evident in the sequences that drive the plot forward. These sequences contain detailed explanations of how they climbed and the dialogues that occurred before, during and after the climb. Krakauer has been thorough in building up the story, enabling the reader to get a multifaceted view of practical and personal preoccupations connected to the trek.

From the moment I agreed to go to Nepal my intention was to ascend every bit as high as my unexceptional legs and lungs would carry me. By the time Linda drove me to the airport she had long since seen through my prevarications. [...] 'If you get killed,' she argued with a mix of despair and anger, 'it's not just you who'll pay the price.' [...] 'I'm not going to get killed,' I answered. 'Don't be melodramatic'. (88)

Krakauer's laconic answer to his wife is representative for the tone in his narrative, but as the reader already knows his wife is anticipating the worst case scenario that will come to pass. This is another example where the resemblance to analepsis is striking. The author is clearly referring to succeeding events which thereby further contributes to the anticipatory suspense.

The narrative view in *Into Thin Air* is consistently first person, mixed with direct speech. Typically, the narrator draws the reader's attention to an issue often emphasised by utterances or dialogues regarding these issues:

Rob was always especially concerned about the welfare of the Sherpas who worked for him. [...] 'The Sherpas we've hired are the best in the business,' he told us.[...] 'Without the support of our Sherpas none of us has any chance of climbing the mountain'. (55-56)

On reaching the Base Camp and on the acclimatisation treks they now had to do, the team members entered the real 'contact zone' where it is obvious that Everest represents something different:

The first body had left me badly shaken for several hours; the shock of encountering the second wore off almost immediately. Few of the climbers trudging by had given either corpse more than a passing glance. It was as if there were an unspoken agreement on the mountain to pretend that these desiccated remains weren't real – as if none of us dared to acknowledge what was at stake here. (111)

It also becomes clear, at least for the narrator, what climbing Everest means in terms of personal capacities: "The ratio of misery to pleasure was greater by an order of magnitude than any other mountain I'd been on; I quickly came to understand that climbing Everest was primarily about enduring pain" (140). Such observations are solely commented on by



the author unless they occur in direct speech. In a non-fictional narrative it would have been an obvious generic fallacy if the narrator had conveyed any observations through a third-person narrative view. Accordingly, Krakauer's own endeavours are frequently and meticulously portrayed, especially in the more technical parts of the climb:

A thousand feet up the immense slant of the Lohtse Face, I ascended a faded nylon rope that seemed to go on forever, and the higher I got, the more laggardly I moved. I slid my jumar up the fixed line with a gloved hand, rested my weight on the device to draw to burning, labored breaths; then I moved my left foot up and stamped the crampon into the ice, desperately sucked in another two lungfuls of air; planted my right foot next to my left, inhaled and exhaled again; and slid the jumar up the rope one more time. (139)

If the readers have trekked in high-altitude areas, which I suspect many of Krakauer's readers have, they can relate to the sensation of working in thin air. But in passages similar to the example above, the reading becomes somewhat unpleasant from a stylistic point of view. Short sentences and a series of semicolons accelerate the rhythm, making the reading experience a sense of labour linked to the physical action as described. As I noted in chapter two, *Typhoon* has several passages that have a similar effect. This is particularly conspicuous in the fragmented direct speech between Mr. Jukes and MacWhirr when they try to communicate in the storm. "...Says...whole lot...fetched away...Ought to see...what's the matter" (Conrad, 43). However, Conrad manages to produce density far more skilfully through a fine selection of highly charged words. These observations lead to the conclusion that there is a similar intention to be found in the two narratives. The physical language in many of Krakauer's descriptions, the charged language and the fragmented speech in some of Conrad's dialogues, are fine examples of how it is possible to provoke a physical sensation through a distortion of normal semantic conventions.

Following the expedition and its members on the laborious way to the summit the reader is also introduced to the crucial and painful part of any expedition to high-altitude mountains: the acclimatization process. The carefully planned steps in order to prevent pulmonary diseases, cerebral haemorrhage or other complications related to their climb, are also carefully accounted for:

As I nervously threaded my way through the frozen, froaning disorder, I noticed that my breathing wasn't quite as labored as it had been during our first trip up the glacier; already my body was starting to adapt to the altitude. My dread of getting crushed by a falling serac, however, was at least as great as before. (108)

Krakauer documents the technical challenges and weather throughout the narrative. In passages of direct speech, most of the content revolves around equal matters and different member's dilemmas on whether or not to continue towards the summit:

'I'm fucked,' Doug croaked in a barely audible whisper. Looking crushed. 'I can't even talk. The climb is over for me.' 'Don't write yourself off just yet, Douglas,' Rob offered. 'Wait and see you feel in a couple of days. You're a tough bastard. I think you've got a good shot at the top once you recover'. (129)

Having interviewed many of the members subsequent to the expedition, Krakauer has incorporated dialogues verified by the participants along with facts and observations. Keeping much of his personal opinions on a short leash, he seems to have made an effort to justly present the different member's actions and perspectives. More broadly, there are more important issues which also are accounted for by the author himself. The book was based on an interest in the dangers that commercial treks to Everest present. The most evident discord in the Mount Everest industry was, and continues to be, the escalating numbers of inexperienced mountaineers and the use of supplemental oxygen in a guiding

position. Both these topics are given much attention. Aware of his own limitations, Krakauer frequently quotes the far more experienced leader of his team, Rob Hall, on these issues. “‘With so many incompetent people on the mountain,’ Rob said with a frown one evening in late April, ‘I think it’s pretty unlikely that we get through this season without something bad happening up high’” (104). Being the expert alibi, he is granted thoughtful quotations concerning the real challenge when attempting to reach the Everest summit:

‘To turn around that close to the summit...,’ Hall mused with a shake of his head on May 6 as Kropp plodded past Camp Two on his way down the mountain. ‘That showed incredibly good judgement on young Göran’s part. I’m impressed – considerably more impressed, actually, than if he’d continued climbing and made it to the top.’ [...] ‘With enough determination, any bloody idiot can get up this hill.’ Hall observed. ‘The trick is to get back down alive’. (153)

This cautious approach, referred to by climber as ‘summit fever,’ is incorporated in the narrative as Krakauer himself emphasises the dangerous aspects of the expedition. He, along with his team leader, is no foolhardy or adrenaline seeker who will jeopardise his own, or other’s life in order to make it to the top. Even though Krakauer attempts to give a nuanced portrait of trekkers with an oppositional attitude, there is no doubt that his own approach to mountaineering resembles that of Rob Hall. In his compilation, *Eiger Dreams*, and in various other articles that Krakauer has written, there are long passages that reveal a profound respect for the dangers that climbing represents and contempt for those who fail due to the lack of such a respect. Upon this point Krakauer is careful not to be too judgemental when accounting for other person’s approach to mountaineering. Perhaps the reason for that is the *fait accompli* in Krakauer’s narrative; thin air changes normal perceptiveness and weakens the function level of the brain:

It can't be stressed strongly enough, moreover, that Hall, Fisher, and the rest of us were forced to make such critical decisions while severely impaired with hypoxia. In pondering how this disaster could have occurred, it is imperative to remember that lucid thought is all but impossible at 29,000 feet. (285)

When the teams prepare themselves for the final move to the top at camp four, they have already entered the 'death zone' above twenty five thousand feet. Chapters twelve through twenty, which constitute the dramatic part of the book, should therefore be read with the author's and other climbers' waning mental capacity in mind. From the beginning of the ascent to the summit on 10 May, until Krakauer has reached the fourth camp the following night, the narrative changes focus. It is now that the effect of thin air becomes a serious problem, only to be further amplified by the stress of violent weather. Sequences of analeptic character disappear and observations concerning the other climbers become sparse. Instead, Krakauer's own climb is devoted more attention, a device that suggestively implies a feeling of inwardness induced by the strain of working in thin air. "In this godforsaken place, I felt disconnected from the climbers around me – emotionally, spiritually, physically – to a degree I hadn't experienced on any previous expedition. We were a team in name only, I'd sadly come to realize" (171). To a certain degree this realisation of inflicted stress resembles the authorial narrator's observation in *Typhoon*. The "disintegrating power of a great wind," which "isolates one from one's kind" (Conrad, 30), here becomes the effect of thin air. When the storm reaches them it enhances the 'disintegrating power' that already has contributed to the lack of interaction. Unlike *Typhoon*, however, this effect had made its toll on everybody, including the guides, which means that there was no coherent force that was able to adjust to the situation the way Captain MacWhirr did onboard the *Nan-Shan*. Rob Hall lingered on the upper mountain

throughout the storm and tried to summon those who were left there, but he too eventually succumbed being severely delusional and fatigued.

During the utterly confusing and chaotic state that the fictional crew of *Nan Shan* and the climbers at Everest found themselves in, both writers refer to the narrowing down of mental focus of merely thinking in simple utterances. In Mr. Jukes' case it was the repetition of the words 'Oh My God', indicating that he is panicking due to the fact that he is convinced of a deadly outcome of his situation. In Krakauer's account there are no signs that imply similar sensations on his own behalf and it is seemingly never so bad that he actually thinks he is going to die. But in the midst of the storm he definitely reaches a point where he admits that he fears for his life. "Fighting to maintain a grip on reality, I started talking to myself out loud. 'Keep it together, keep it together, keep it together,' I chanted over and over, mantra like" (200). Even though these two events are marginal in both narratives, they are important as demonstrations of mental phases in a life-threatening situation. Mr. Jukes is clearly beyond coherent thought and has lost control over his actions. The utterly traumatic experience leaves him in a state of indifference. Krakauer is clearly fighting a mental battle in order to keep this indifference under control. From many years of experience he knows that surviving in the mountains depends on not crossing this line. The hypoxia in combination with the violent wind had led other participants far past this point and perpetuated the disaster:

'I sat Yasuko down in Beck's lap,' Madsen recalls, 'but he was pretty unresponsive by that time, and Yasuko wasn't moving at all. A little later I saw that she'd laid down flat on her back, with snow blowing into her hood. Somehow she'd lost a glove – her right hand was bare, and her fingers were curled up so tightly you couldn't straighten them. It looked like they were pretty much frozen to the bone'. (222-223)

As the author eventually salvages himself by reaching the tents at camp four, the drama of life and death continues outside. The result of being in an environment of harsh realities leads to many vexations of the mind, like leaving those who fall behind. “Hutchison decided that Lhakpa was right – there was only one choice, however difficult: let nature take its inevitable course with Beck and Yasuko, and save the group’s resources those who could actually be helped” (260). Still affected by the thin air, Krakauer renders how he reacts to the information about what has happened during the night of the storm:

Confronted with this tally, my mind balked and retreated into a weird, almost robotic state of detachment. I felt emotionally anesthetized yet hyperaware, as if I had fled into a bunker deep inside my skull and was peering out at the wreckage around me through a narrow, armoured slit. (257)

This is a fine description of the detachment that climbers claim to experience while operating in high altitudes. Simultaneously, it is a reminder of the vast difference between non-fictional and fictional narratives. Krakauer is saying that at this point his emotions are shut down and that he is shielding himself from the tragedy. Accordingly, the remorse and laments traceable in Krakauer’s non-fictional extreme narratives must be ascribed to a retrospective view. In *Into Thin Air* there are frequent reminders of the family and friends who now face the loss of their beloved. An omission of such emotional aspects would at best be considered as cynicism due to the lack of imaginative skills. Krakauer clearly has respect and empathy for the people who now have to experience grief and pain, but the emphatic attitude was nevertheless not present while he was experiencing the ordeal. In a fictional narrative however, the detachment and cynicism that strike otherwise emphatic people, could have been incorporated in a character or narrated by an omniscient narrator. Conrad’s *MacWhirr* is a fine example of this approach. By giving the captain a personality whose function is to contrast the great power of violent weather, it was unnecessary for

Conrad to tell exactly how powerful it was. Of course, what the captain in *Typhoon* was lacking can hardly be ascribed to cynicism or empathy, but rather ignorance and dullness.

In order to give an answer to how and why the disaster on Mount Everest could happen, Krakauer presents three explanatory reasons. These are whether or not the guides should have turned their groups around earlier, if they should have used oxygen and the cooperation with other teams. Concerning the latter issue, though attempting to give a nuanced view of all participants, there are clear signals that determine where Krakauer's sympathies lie. Andy Harris, Scott Fisher and Ang Dorje, who were respectively guides and a climbing Sherpa seem to be highly valued and are described in seemingly favourable terms like "big sturdy lad [...] with rugged good looks" (51), "a strapping gregarious man [...] with a surfeit of manic energy" (66), and "a slender man with delicate features [...] and astounding physical strength" (108). At the opposite end of the scale of favourable characterisation is the leader of the South African team. "Their leader was Ian Woodall, thirty-nine, a loquacious, mouse like man who relished telling anecdotes about his brave exploits as a military commando behind enemy lines during South Africa's brutal conflict with Angola in the 1980s" (99). When it becomes clear that Woodall is a great imposter and vastly uncooperative it is obvious that the author has nothing but contempt for him. Similarly, the New York celebrity Sandy Hill Pittman also receives unflattering characteristics as she seemed more interesting in rousing media attention and brought with her highly unnecessary items, like a coffee-maker and advanced communication equipment. Such harsh personal characterisations are not frequent in the narrative, but they are a pertinent reminder of the subjectivity which is inevitably a part of a personal account. There is no specific method to how the other members are portrayed, except demonstrating what the author himself assumes is normal conduct on an expedition to Everest. He is referring to a protocol that guides and experienced climbers are expected to know without elaborating

on what it consists of. Societies and environments of different kinds inevitably develop sets of unwritten rules and norms that usually occur over time. These become particularly emphasised in conditions where human effort and error are crossmarks in a diagram that renders success or failure. Surely, Krakauer's narrative will be coloured by the fact that he is an experienced climber himself and that he respects this protocol. Consequently, with common sense of logic, most readers will be inclined to interpret the author's judgements as the more reasonable approach:

I noticed that Boukreev, like Lopsang, wasn't using supplemental oxygen. Although the Russian had summited Everest twice before without gas, and Lopsang thrice, I was surprised Fisher had given them permission to guide the peak without it, which didn't seem to be in their client's best interest. (186)

Being one of the most controversial issues in high-altitude climbing, this discussion stirred the climbing world after *Into Thin Air* was published. In Anatoli Boukreev's own narrative of the disaster, *The Climb* (1997), he strongly protests against the use of supplemental oxygen. Among the people who supported his view was the famed Austrian climber, Reinhold Messner, who has climbed Everest on several occasions without using oxygen. Their approach to high-altitude mountaineering is that people are exposed to thin air differently. Those who cannot climb that high without technical assistance should not be eligible for expeditions to the summit of Everest or any other mountains where supplemental oxygen is required. Boukreev's attitude to guiding in general is described in undoubtedly unfavourable terms:

He was quite outspoken in his belief that it was a mistake for guides to pamper their clients. 'If client cannot climb Everest without big help from guide,' Boukreev told



me, [author] ‘this client should not be on Everest. Otherwise there can be big problems up high’. (156)

As Krakauer goes on to explain, this individualistic approach was strange since he after all was hired to be a guide. He offers an explanation by referring to cultural differences. “As a Russian, Boukreev came from a tough, proud, hardscrabble climbing culture that did not believe in coddling the weak” (155-156). By ascribing this attitude to cultural distinctions, Krakauer points to a case of west meeting east in travel writing. However, the tradition of commercial treks stems from the United Kingdom and has grown the most in early industrialised countries and affluent like U.S.A, Australia, New Zealand, and recently in Japan. From a philosophical point of view, many European climbers are sceptical about this industry, along with many Asian countries where religious convictions also inflicts. Thus, there are no clear boundaries as to which side of this discussion one finds oneself; an American climber could easily support the views of Boukrev and Messner’s. The issues of supplemental oxygen, commercial expeditions and climbing Everest are thus part of an ongoing trans-cultural debate.

In the epilogue Krakauer offers a more radical view to the problem of climbing Everest. He has included a response to the discussion in the wake of *Into Thin Air* in the form of a letter he received from a Nepalese who claims, according to Buddhist beliefs, that Everest is sacred land and should not be climbed at all. In the concluding paragraph the young man writes, “Remember the Titanic, Even the unsinkable sank, and what are foolish mortals like Weathers, Pittman, Fischer, Lopsang, Tenzing, Messner, Bonington in the face of ‘Mother Goddess’” (299). The Titanic paradox which is referred to here is relevant to the thematics of both *Typhoon* and *Into Thin Air*. As I commented in chapter two, Conrad also had a particular involvement in the debate, manifested by two essays. In “Some Reflections on the Loss of the Titanic” (1912), he laments over the loss of lives and he is unequivocal

in placing the responsibility. “A man may do his best, but he cannot succeed in a task which from greed, or more likely from sheer stupidity, has been made too great for anybody's strength” (Conrad, pp). In essence, the fallacy of imagining that man can travel safely at all times and control the world on human conditions perpetuates disasters. Messner and Boukreevs deduction is that if you try to climb Everest, you should do so on terms that are given to you by genetic selection, or by what you have achieved by training. Giving Conrad’s warnings of the consequences of modern technology and the greed for greatness and wealth, it is not unlikely that he would have supported their view if he had been presented to the problem. The quotations opening each chapter also show how this issue has been reflected upon long before the introduction of oxygen and fully guided expeditions to Everest. In 1938 Eric Shipton wrote:

Perhaps we had become a little arrogant with our fine new technique of ice-claw and rubber slipper, our age of easy mechanical conquest. We had forgotten that the mountain still holds the master card, that it will grant success only in its own good time. Why else does mountaineering retain its deep fascination? (Shipton in Krakauer, 7)

Thus, running parallel to Conrad’s criticism of modern technology as above nature and warnings of the loss of traditional seamanship, there is a similar critical aspect in *Into Thin Air*. Moreover, it was the interest in the commercial industry that allowed ‘ordinary’ people to climb Everest which was the very reason for Krakauer to be there. Sadly, and ironically, he was able to give an account of one of the tragic consequences that this growing industry would yield.

Karakauer has repeatedly been criticised for being too personal and also for distorting what was actually said by different members in his and other teams. In the

epilogue and the postscript to *Into Thin Air*, Krakauer allows the reader to learn about some of the reactions he has received and the bitter debate which succeeded the disaster. In addition to the self-critical attitude which Krakauer demonstrates in the account, this information gives evidence of a remarkably honest author. The letter he received from Lisa Fischer-Luckenbach, Scott Fischer's sister, is particularly hostile:

Based on your written word, YOU certainly seem now to have the uncanny ability to know precisely what was going on in the minds and hearts of every individual on the expedition. Now that YOU are home, alive and well, you have judged the judgements of others, analyzed their intentions, behaviors, personalities and motivation. You have commented on what SHOULD have been done by the leader, the Sherpas, the clients, and have made arrogant accusations of their wrongdoing. All according to Jon Krakauer, who after sensing the doom brewing, scrambled back to his tent for his own safety and survival. (297)

Throughout these accusations Krakauer has been consistent in referring to the title of his book and thereby claimed that his intention has always been to tell the tale as he experienced it. However, by using the term 'account' a paradox occurs as it would imply accordance with the truth. A double paradox immediately arises as it would be illogical to claim that any account is impersonal. More precisely put, would it have been possible to create a functional narrative without being personal? In the wake of the publishing of *Into Thin Air* and the still ongoing debate about what actually happened on Everest, at least three books, including the above mentioned *The Climb*, and a vast amount of articles have been published by other expedition members. They have all felt compelled to write their stories, regardless of whether they were offended by, or supported Krakauer's version of the truth. Similar to the general discourse concerning historical narratives, the debate has

thus revolved around whose truth is the most accurate. I will leave this highly ambivalent question to be answered by those who were there.

Krakauer has for the last twelve months been climbing in Antarctica. Moreover, he has since 1999 refused to comment on or give any interviews about the expedition to Everest or *Into Thin Air*. Any attempt to contact him or his publisher in order to enlighten questions of narrative method would therefore be in vain. However, in comparison to Conrad's highly realistic sea-narrative, and considering Krakauer's previous accounts and articles, it is evident that his experience has incited a certain manner of storytelling. By attempting to shed light on what this storytelling consist of I have discussed the narration in *Into Thin Air*. Since it is difficult to point to parallels between a fictional and non-fictional text, I have commented what may be perceived as resembling aspects of narrative in *Typhoon*. Well aware of the vast generic difference between fiction and non-fiction, it still seems as though some elements of narrative method can claim to contain similar evocative and associative functions when crossing the fictional border.

By regarding the narration of *Into Thin Air* in light of the narrative method in *Typhoon* it is evident that one of Conrad's lesser acclaimed novels is important in the discourse of contemporary travel writing. As Hulme suggests, travel writing was, until the late nineteen seventies, "a fundamentally nineteenth-century genre" (Hulme, 91). As the literary discourse changed, the recognition of fiction as a part of the travel writing genre made it possible to include narrative methods that function in more or less the same manner as those one will find in modern fictional narratives. As I have argued in chapter two, Conrad's *Typhoon* is an example of early modern travel writing that, despite being a fictional work, is very realistic. Without considerably compromising the non-fiction format, it is evident that features of Conrad's narrative method partly comply with the method in Krakauer's non-fictional personal account. There is no doubt that Krakauer has found

inspiration in Conrad's writing. This is also evident by the references to several Conrad titles in Krakauer's books.

It is likely that many readers would have heard or read about what happened on Everest in May 1996. The expedition members' various nationalities and the permanent attraction that the world highest mountain holds resulted in vast media coverage around the world. If the reader has failed to notice the incident, the prolepsis in the opening pages largely summarises the narrative and the outcome of the ordeal. Thus, contrary to what one might expect from a thematically similar fictional narrative, Krakauer has not written an account that sets out to unfold unknown information in order to build up suspension. The laconic, simple and direct style is amplified by the highly evocative potential that lies in the proleptic forwarding in the first section of the book. As the reader is immediately informed about why this became a disaster, the focus is effectively shifted to *how* it became a disaster. However, I doubt that creating suspense was the foremost motivation for the author to plunge into his recollection and re-live the ordeal. The inclusion of the prolepsis suggests what he repeatedly comments on himself: How is it possible to become an object for life-threatening situations? Actualised by commercial treks to the summit of Mount Everest, the author has outlined one of the consequences of challenging what may be one of the last earthly boundaries of today.

The title of *Into Thin Air* points to the mythical aspect of venturing into the largely inhuman area, the death zone, above twenty-five thousand feet. Additionally, there is a sense of ambivalence in the reference to the idiomatic expression which signifies something that is disintegrating and vanishing. Furthermore, in the subtitle the author states that it is a 'personal account' which notifies the reader of the narrative view that should be expected throughout the story. The book includes a list of all participants on the various expeditions operating on Everest that year, a map indicating the route from Base Camp to the summit,

and a mid-section consisting of photos of central expedition members and showing different teams on their way to the summit. All these features are frequently used in travel literature; perhaps particularly in mountaineering accounts. Thus, Krakauer has relied on traditional generic features in the presentation of his narrative. However, in *Into Thin Air* there is a certain aesthetical dimension maintained by the use of illustrations for each chapter. The darkness and drama that these illustrations convey resemble the conceptualisation of darkness in Conrad's *Typhoon*.

The narrative can roughly be divided into two sections in which there are variations in method and style. Additionally, the last chapter, the epilogue and the postscript figure as a unit which summarises personal and professional reactions that have occurred in the wake of the disaster. Chapters one through eleven describe the journey up to the fourth camp where they eventually commence the final thrust to the summit. In combination with observations on the journey up to this point, the narrative consists of analeptic sequences that present the expedition history of Mount Everest and background information on both central and more peripheral characters. In sequences where the plot is moving slowly the language is often laconic and dense, direct and based solely on what the author has observed and heard. The author is consistently the narrator of the story, while dialogues and statements by co-participants are reproduced in the form of direct speech. Krakauer is seemingly not inclined to incorporate passages which touch on more profound aspects of philosophy or metaphysics revolving nature. This is either a conscious choice or a result of limited poetic skills which, regardless of reason, is reminiscent of the Conradian employment of the term 'rendering'. In a non-fictional narrative the 'renderer' would obviously be the authorial narrator and the 'renderings', the accurate observations and descriptions made by this agent. The observer, who in this case is Krakauer, seems to be consistent in not making his own interpretations and opinions overt in the narrative. Thus,

by being an observer and allowing for different points of view, the reader is capable of forming own opinions about different matters. That is one of the reasons to trust Krakauer when he claims that he wanted to reproduce the disaster as accurately as possible.

In chapters twelve through twenty the narrative approach which resembles 'rendering' is less conspicuous. Sequences which diverge from the linear narrative disappear and the author's own experience of the final climb to the summit and the encounter with the storm while descending is highlighted. The notion of working in thin air is emphasised both by narrative comments on the subject and occasionally in passages where the language is particularly dense and static. Krakauer comments that the account in this part of the story must be considered with a view to the lack of oxygen and accordingly that his recollection might be distorted. On one occasion he mistakes one of his team members for being a guide and erroneously reports to his team that the guide has made it to the tents at camp four. The fact that he explains this error in the postscript, rather than when it occurred in the linear position in the narrative, demonstrates that he is consistent in telling the story as he experienced it at the time of the event.

In the process of writing a non-fictional narrative there are certain generic conventions that necessitate a more limited use of literary devices and techniques. In *Into Thin Air* these limitations are evident in that a narrative perspective other than the first person is not likely. Furthermore, descriptions of others person's consciousness is obviously impossible and direct speech cannot be adjusted to fit a particular mood or voice. It is considerably more difficult to create a good narrative when literary tools reserved for fiction are omitted. Obviously, the vast drama implicit in nature is a rewarding basis for any narrative, but it has to be constructed wisely in order to evoke the reader's interest. According to the theoretical basis for my thesis and in the comparative light of Conrad's fictional extreme narrative, it is fairly safe to claim that Krakauer has conveyed extreme

nature successfully in his non-fictional narrative. His use of temporal order devices, his consistent authorial point of view, in combination with a laconic, direct and dense language, demonstrate that he is keeping within generic conventions. Considering literary aesthetic aspects, they are obviously not comparable to those of Conrad's fiction. I would in any case strongly doubt the factual basis for a non-fictional narrative with such artistic literary features.

As mentioned, the basis for *Into Thin Air* was a reportage that Krakauer did for *Outdoor Magazine*. Shedding light on the growing debate on the problem of granting everyone with financial means accessibility to the mountain, he practically stumbled over the material for his narrative. It seems like Krakauer's foremost intention is to report the actual events in order to figure out how and why this tragedy happened. Aided by research, interviews and his own recollection he has managed to obtain a considerable insight and to give a realistic display of human reaction to nature at its most extreme. The features of narrative method seem to function so that the authorial voice is undoubtedly present, but does not intervene in a manner that is blurring or distorting central thematic aspects. Accordingly, the narrative is discursive in the discussion of themes like oxygen support, responsibility and error. Finally, there is a dark and pessimistic resonance throughout the narrative and in the concluding remarks by the author. If one wishes to ascribe an authorial colouring to the narrative, this darkness would most likely be the main feature. A possible effect is that the reader is left with the impression that occasional incidents like this will always prevail. It is embedded in human nature to challenge frontiers regardless of the risk of being endangered by the unforeseeable and chaotic violence of nature. That was evidently Joseph Conrad's vision too.



## **Chapter Four: Conclusion**

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The overall aim of this thesis has been to study the narration of man's confrontation with extreme nature. Focusing on nature's violence as the decisive feature and basis for interpretations, I have discussed narrative method in *Typhoon* compared to similar narration patterns in Jon Krakauer's *Into Thin Air*. The narration of the extreme, either it is concerning human behaviour or nature, is not a simple exercise. To convey such experiences with words require a thorough knowledge about the particular element and a steady handling of evocative and associative devices. It is evident that Conrad and Krakauer have written texts that comply with these qualities. Obviously, having been published with nearly a century departing them, and being respectively fictional and non-fictional texts, there are certain historical and generic aspects that must be considered in order to make a coherent comparison.

In order to study the method of these texts I have applied the theoretical principles of Mikael Bahktin, Gérard Genette and Dorrit Cohn. In the respective chapters on *Typhoon* and *Into Thin Air*, I first established how these narratives emerged from their respective temporal and spatial context. Further, I considered which aspects of narrative method are most conspicuous and thereafter pointed to similar functioning devices. I have also discussed how these texts can be brought together despite their obvious generic differences. In this concluding chapter I will clarify and explain what I have found and attempt to answer the questions raised in my problem statement. First, how Joseph Conrad approach extreme nature in his fictional travel narrative *Typhoon*, compared to Jon Krakauer's approach in his non-fictional narrative *Into Thin Air*? With a view to reader response, is it possible to claim that these approaches are functioning similarly? Second, given the obvious fact that non-fiction and fiction are distinctive genres, how does this discrepancy function when an utterly realistic device such as extreme nature is the decisive

feature? Finally, how do the respective narrative methods enhance and actualise thematic concerns?

In the beginning of the twentieth century the British Empire had obtained vast land masses and continued to expand. Together with industrial development and infrastructural modernisation, these factors made European citizens spread around the world. Returning to the cultural centres of western civilisation was of course an incredible wealth, but also stories from unknown and exotic places. Joseph Conrad's *Typhoon* is one example of travel writing emerging because of the commencement of global trade and simultaneously merging with the impressionist trends in art. In common with contemporaries such as D.H. Lawrence, Virginia Woolf and Rudyard Kipling, Conrad approached travelling as a frame for fictional exploration of themes such as human psyche, personal change and relation to nature. In order to convey his experiences at sea, Conrad incorporates extreme nature as a decisive device in *Typhoon*. As a thematic display of how such forces can prompt self-awareness, the short story was not originally considered as travel writing in the manner we look at such writing today. Nor was Conrad and his contemporaries' other fictional work. It was not until the late 1970s that travel literature was considered seriously as a distinctive genre within academic literary criticism. In the wake of theoretical approaches such as poststructuralism and deconstructionism, fiction became accepted as a part of travel narratives which were basically non-fictional. Introducing typically modernistic devices within categories such as temporal order, duration, mood and voice, travel writing 'caught up' with modernism.

The audience and perhaps particularly the media have not been equally enthusiastic to allegedly non-fictional narratives possessed of fictional aspects. As the sub-title indicates, *Into Thin Air* is a personal account, but it has not escaped scrutiny regarding trustworthiness and allegations of falsification of facts. Considering generic conventions of

non-fiction, it is evident that Krakauer has narrated his story without exceeding such limits. The question of truth must therefore be answered by those who have witnessed the events reported. In this thesis the issue of truth has revolved around how realism in Conrad's writing can be viewed in comparison to the narration of contemporary non-fiction. There are, however, certain generic problems that have needed clarification in order to give a productive comparative discussion of these narratives.

Conrad used his experiences as a sailor to create a literary environment in which he could explore his ideas. Krakauer, on the other hand, shares his experiences from an event which he was actually taking part in. It is therefore an inevitable conclusion that *Into Thin Air* cannot be considered as an approach to extreme nature dependent on certain devices and techniques. The synchronic model defines the 'story' as the actual chronology of events in the narrative, and 'discourse' as devices and techniques applied in the narrative. If I have understood Dorrit Chon correctly, any fictional narrative encompasses this relation, but 'discourse' cannot be applied directly to non-fictional narratives. This deduction makes perfect sense and it has not been my aim to challenge its validity either. However, Jon Krakauer has accounted for a story by constructing it in a manner that immediately captures the reader's interest and by various means keeps that interest. There is a method to this type of storytelling which I believe resembles many of the narrative features one will find in fictional presentations of equal matters. Conrad's *Typhoon* is placed at the beginning of the modern era which over the last thirty years has exerted a significant influence on non-fictional travel narratives. On the other hand, an account such as *Into Thin Air* reveals how accurately Conrad presents characters encountering the extreme forces of nature. It is this critical interdependency which makes it interesting to regard these narratives together. Nevertheless, while the narrative method of *Typhoon* can be scrutinised and defined

because there is a 'story-discourse' relation, I have been wary of making such assessments regarding narration in *Into Thin Air*.

Critics often refer to Conrad's narrative technique as being 'renderings' which place the author as an observer to the events that are unfolding in the narrative. This technique perpetuates a strong authorial voice, which is evident in many of his narratives. *Typhoon* is perhaps one of Conrad's narratives in where this technique is most conspicuous. The 'observer' in *Typhoon* also maintains an attitude of reserve towards sharing information on characters. Accordingly, Conrad invites the reader to draw his or hers own conclusions as the plot develops. There are indeed many aspects of *Typhoon* that remain unexplained, or that only partly are accounted for, for instance the peculiar personality of MacWhirr. Details of the change that he supposedly has gone through are also just hinted at through the views of Mr. Jukes and Mr. Rout.

In *Into Thin Air* there are relatively long sequences unfolding the history of Everest expeditions and character descriptions. These factual matters are appropriate and perhaps inevitable in a narrative which purports to be a factual account. However, it is evident that Krakauer has attempted to keep a low profile when recollecting and narrating his own experiences from the expedition. It must be in any writer's interest that they manage to convey their experience in their writing and accordingly invite the reader to imagine what they have been a part of. Krakauer has undoubtedly found inspiration in Conrad as there are quotations from Conrad's narratives in *Into Thin Air*. Further, it is plausible that Krakauer's literal approach is reminiscent of aspects of Conrad's narrative method in *Typhoon* because the two authors have similar experiences from their respective encounters with extreme nature.

Common for both narratives is that they are written in a style which seems to allow for no superfluous language. Furthermore, there are few elaborate psychological comments on characters and on philosophical or contemplative concerns. Considering aesthetic aspects, *Into Thin Air* is qualitatively inferior to *Typhoon*. However, the validity of this observation is questionable since aesthetic aspects of a text are hardly interpretable when the synchronic bi-level model is inconsistent. Writing a non-fictional narrative necessitates strict accordance with narrative points of view. The aesthetics inevitably suffers under such circumstances as it is far more difficult to maintain this dimension only from the point of an authorial narrator. This observation is evident in the discrepancy between analeptic sequences in *Typhoon*, where the reader is given a personal viewpoint in the form of letters. In *Into Thin Air*, sequences which diverge from the linear narrative are continuously narrated from the authorial point of view, focusing on verifiable information rather than a subjective perspective. This discrepancy between non-fiction and fiction is only one example that demonstrates the freedom and flexibility of fictional narratives. Because of the generic difference and the limitations that non-fictional narratives have according to conventions, I have not devoted much attention to aesthetic aspects of Krakauer's book. However, the illustrations in *Into Thin Air* demonstrate how aesthetic concerns can be incorporated in order to convey thematic concepts. In Krakauer's narrative, for instance, there is a darkness conveyed in the illustrations which is hardly applicable to, or unambiguously supported by, the words of an authorial narrator.

Conrad asserted that the interest in *Typhoon* lies not in the weather, but how an encounter with extreme weather has the ability to change fundamental aspects of characters' self-awareness. This change is most conspicuous in Captain MacWhirr and Jukes, who gradually emerge as the two main characters of the tale. The final protagonist in the narrative is the typhoon which causes the brutal revolt in MacWhirr and Jukes. The

narration of the typhoon, or the 'great wind,' is undoubtedly a result of a strong and personal relation to the meteorological phenomenon. This observation is most evident in passages which describe the sea and the wind by using personification. The typhoon is described as something beastly whose purpose is to stir the foundations of a man's psyche. However, these passages never become hyperbolic or threaten to overshadow the human drama on board the ship. The language is laconic and direct, frequently dense and highly charged. The evocative effects and associative aspects that emerge from such language create a considerable suspense and a vast contrast to the dull character MacWhirr.

Dialogues and monologues in *Typhoon* are narrated in the third person, either as direct speech or as the third-person narrator's insight in some of the characters' consciousness. This perspective is used in the analeptic sequences where information about MacWhirr is shared by the views of Jukes and MacWhirr's wife. These letters also effectively break up the linear narrative, thus making the reading experience less monotonous. Furthermore, they soften the ironic and humoristic portrayal of the captain, making his characterisation more realistic.

There is also a highly effective ellipsis between chapter five and six which provide a great contrast to the violent storm. As the captain and his crew are ready to pass the eye of the typhoon and MacWhirr expresses his worry of losing his ship, the narrator laconically expostulates that 'he was spared that annoyance'. In the next instance the sun is shining, the water is still, and the ship is about to embark in the port of the final destination. This display of duration in the narrative is not only pointing to the abrupt change that has happened in MacWhirr and Mr. Jukes. It is also a fine example of a modernist device which leaves a clear evidence of the literary period in which *Typhoon* belongs.

Being an actual event with high rotation in the world media when it occurred, the outcome of the Everest disaster is already known to Krakauer's audience. For those who do not know it beforehand Krakauer surveys the tragedy over the first five pages of his narrative. Apart from this important narrative variation, the temporal order of events in *Into Thin Air* follows the exact time-line according to when they occurred. A deviation from this order can easily be perceived as manipulation of the narrative and accordingly break with conventions of the non-fictional genre. However, the initial part of Krakauer's account opens in media res, on the summit of Everest, continues by revealing that people will die, before eventually asking rhetorically how these deaths could happen. In interpretations of fictional narratives this technique would have been referred to as a prolepsis as for instance in Thornton Wilder. The 'prolepsis' of *Into Thin Air* functions as an evocative reminder of what the author wants the reader to be interested in; not *if* someone will die, but why and how these deaths happened.

*Into Thin Air* has a progressive narrative development as the events approach the culminating ordeal. The narrative can roughly be divided into two sections which have certain variations in how they are narrated. Additionally, the debate that followed and reactions to the publishing of *Into Thin Air* are summarised in an epilogue and a postscript. Chapters one through eleven consist of observations and information on other participants and expedition members, reproductions of dialogues and Krakauer's own perceptions as they venture towards the fourth camp which is the final frontier before moving into the death zone and ascending the summit. Krakauer is consistently the narrator unless he refers to dialogues in direct speech. His comments are often laconic, while the narrative at large is dense and direct. He is also seemingly consistent in not including comments on philosophical or metaphysical aspects of nature which can be regarded as shrewd or profound. It is difficult to determine whether this is a conscious choice or Krakauer is

merely lacking the literary apparatus in order to incorporate such features. Nevertheless, his narrative restraint functions well to keep a low sensational profile since the reader already is informed about the tragedy that lies ahead. However, Krakauer's narration is reminiscent of the Conradian employment of the term 'rendering,' in the sense that nothing is made covert. Upholding matters of fact oriented narrative voice is a wise choice for a narrative which aims to report what actually happened.

The reference to 'rendering' as a narrative approach is less conspicuous in chapters twelve through twenty. The focus changes from observational comments to the author's own experiences as he struggles to reach the summit and the succeeding descent to camp four. Passages which diverge from the linear narrative also become rarer as Krakauer is seemingly climbing alone for large parts of the thrust to the summit and the return through the storm. At this point Krakauer warns that the account must be considered with his and other participant's waning mental capacities due to the lack of oxygen. This state may have lead to distortion of memory which would explain the restricted factual information about the actions and utterances made by climbers. The physical shape of the storm is only referred to as the climbers approach the summit, but while the storm surrounds the climbers the focus is on the inward struggle which Krakauer himself experiences. The consequences for other climbers are comments on physical injuries and recapitulations of how some of them unfortunately succumbed to the violent wind. The impact of the extreme forces is thus narrated from an internal or personal perspective, rather than presenting an overlooking view of the physical attributes of the storm. This narrative perspective is reminiscent to the intention Conrad assumedly had when he wanted to portray the violent wind properly. It is an inevitable and permanent force that is best portrayed from a perspective which includes the perceptions of those who are subjected to these forces. Even though Krakauer has not expressed any such intentions, it is evident that he has realised the strong and evocative



effects of a personal narration. Thus, both Conrad's and Krakauer's understanding of true proportions of extreme nature are not conveyed through nature's physical appearance, but via the minds of those who experience the extreme.

In literary research there are critics who point to the sublime in relation to aspects of nature. These aspects are often perceived as inexplicable by use of mere words because language cannot encompass the inward sensation one has towards such experiences. Since I have focused on narrative method and narration in this thesis I have avoided such sensational approaches. However, Joseph Conrad and Jon Krakauer seem to have managed to portray events and extreme nature in a manner which appeals not only the reader's imagination, but also to his or her emotional register. The occasion for obtaining this effect seems to rely on the omission of anything that in words attempts to describe the sublime. Thus, if imagination is a benefit meant for the reader, extreme narratives require a subtle, introvert narration.

Both authors have pointed to central issues concerning travel and the ongoing process of modernisation in their respective epochs in history. To a certain degree, Krakauer has continued the debate that Conrad addressed a century before him. Critics have claimed that *MacWhirr* represents the consequences of blunt belief in modern technology represented by the transition to motorised sea vessels. Faced with nature's violent forces at sea there are aspects of traditional seamanship that, if dismissed or forgotten, will sometimes yield catastrophic results. Accordingly, the reason for *MacWhirr* to steer the *Nan-Shan* directly through the typhoon was that he had not experienced, and did not expect, that there was something a modern steamer could not handle. What Conrad warns against is that regardless of the precautions made, equipment carried, or the crew's physical and mental capacity, there is still a considerable risk of not being able to survive the violence of nature. In *Into Thin Air*, Jon Krakauer has actualised this problem by taking part in the

relatively new tradition of conquering Mount Everest. Thus, the thematic concerns in both narratives are fundamentally the same; nature cannot be defeated because human fallacy is a constant in a system that is chaotic.

The human fallacy in *Typhoon* is represented by both MacWhirr and Jukes. Certain that he is about to die, the young imaginative Jukes succumbs to the mere idea of this realisation. The unimaginative MacWhirr paradoxically becomes the salvation for both himself and his crew and cargo. Thus, there is a certain degree of optimism traceable in *Typhoon*, since the novel, suggests that experience and the ability to learn and adapt can change the ignorance and dumbness that initially led to dangerous miscalculations. In comparison, Krakauer's narrative is far more pessimistic as we know that people continue to push the limits of human exploration not for a common greater benefit, but for individual achievement and self-realisation. *Into Thin Air* is an example of contemporary extreme travel writing which demonstrates some of the infinite qualities in Conrad's fiction. It is also a manifestation of what Conrad warned against when he criticised the ignorance of the invincible man. This ignorance, however, is escalating as it becomes easier to access extreme areas of the world. The thrilling accounts that emerge from such journeys are thus representative of a reactionary tendency within contemporary travel writing.

I conclude that despite the historical context and obvious generic differences which divide *Typhoon* and *Into Thin Air*, there is reason to claim that certain aspects of narrative style and techniques have resembling features. The omniscient narrator in *Typhoon* has a strong relation to the sea which is made evident by a subtle use of personification enhanced by a laconic, precise and charged language when describing violent winds. The narrator of *Into Thin Air* is also consistently direct and laconic in the descriptions of his journey to Mt. Everest. This narrator, who we do not need to distinguish from Krakauer as author since his narrative is non-fictional, seems to keep the fatal outcome of the expedition in focus by not

intervening as a personal spectator, unless it is to describe the painful sensation of climbing the roof of the world. Both authors have lived lives which give notice of profound knowledge about the environment in description. Based on the study of their narratives, there seems to be an agreement that the narration of extreme nature calls for an omission of extrovert speech and that impression of the violent nature is most effective when it is channelled through the mind of characters or the authorial narrator. More precisely, they tell about the inward feel of the extreme, not its visual shape.

We have seen that Conrad uses literary devices such as analepsis and ellipsis, personification and simile in order to engender and enhance the relation between the typhoon and the characters and the interaction between characters. In sum, these devices create trustworthy characterisations, including a dense and charged display of the weather phenomena and echoes of Conrad's own experiences at sea. The manipulation of time and narrative progression, adjusted to non-fiction, is also evident in *Into Thin Air*. Here, these evocative passages capture the reader's interest right from the start. A finely structured, dense and laconic language maintains this interest until the end after the fatal outcome has been thoroughly accounted for.

I began this thesis with an epigraph from Joseph Conrad's *Lord Jim* in which the author claims the existence of 'a sinister violence of intention'. *Typhoon* and *Into Thin Air* are narratives which, in their simplicity and evocative style, are warnings which present the consequences of man's confrontation with the vast powers of nature's violence. Whether it is the power to change man's personality in *Typhoon*, or the deadly ambition to reach the summit accounted for in *Into Thin Air*, the sinister violence of intention in these narratives is a demonstration and a reminder of the true proportions of extreme nature and its effect on the human mind.

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