

Interactive comment on “In my remembered country: what poetry tells us about the changing perceptions of volcanoes” by Arianna Soldati and Sam Illingworth

Arianna Soldati and Sam Illingworth

arianna_soldati@hotmail.it

Received and published: 12 November 2019

David Pyle (Referee)

This paper explores the question of what poetry written about volcanoes reveals about the relationship between humans and volcanoes, using a small selection of English language poems written since 1800. While the idea is certainly interesting, and the qualitative analysis does bring out some themes for discussion, my concern as a reader is that the analysis is obscured by the small number of poems under study, and the way they have been selected. The analysis looks at 34 poems, written since 1800, predominantly by white male Anglophone poets. The time distribution is biased towards

Printer-friendly version

Discussion paper



the present day. Of the twelve 19th century poets, two are women; and only 1 is a native of a volcanic land (Hallgrimson, Iceland). From the 20th century selection, five are women (one of whom is a volcano scientist); and six are natives of volcanic lands (Chile, Nicaragua/El Salvador, Hawaii).

We recognize these limitations. The choice of Anglophone poets is intentional (p.5 l.39) and its limitations are acknowledged (p.22 l.33). This of course affects the volcanic land native/non-native demographics. The same goes for the historical period, as justified starting on p.5 l.42. The gender bias is indeed present, and we now explicitly acknowledge it (p. 6 l.29).

It is not clear that the authors used a systematic approach to locating poems: was the 'manual internet search' simply on google? (and what were the search terms?); or did they use any of the databases of poems that might be accessible through library catalogues?

We actually first used three databases: poetry foundation, poetry society, and poetry archive – then we conducted more specific Internet searches to fill decade gaps. We have now clearly detailed this methodology in the manuscript (p.6 l.7). We thank the reviewer for highlighting the need for a more thorough description of our search methodology.

Do the internal biases within the selections render invalid the idea that the poems can be used to 'tell us about changing perceptions of volcanoes'? What do we know, for example, about the first-hand experiences that the various writers had of volcanoes, or of volcanic activity? My instinct is that a more focussed analysis of a body of work that was better defined in terms of time and location, and considered critically in terms of the nature and experience of the author might provide additional insights into the research question.

We believe they do not – we have clearly stated the limitations of our study, and our conclusions rest on them. However, we are very interested in expanding the study in

[Printer-friendly version](#)[Discussion paper](#)

future work. For example, we had already mentioned our intention to work on the first- vs. second-hand experience of volcanoes (p.23 l.1).

Detailed points.

1. There is a body of relevant work which the authors don't cite but might consider. Analysis of poetry from Montserrat: Donovan, A et al., 2011, Rationalising a volcanic crisis through literature: Montserratian verse and the descriptive reconstruction of an island, *Journal Of Volcanology And Geothermal Research*, 2011 Jun 15(3-4), pp.87- 101. Skinner, J, 2011, A Distinctive Disaster Literature: Montserrat Island Poetry under Pressure, in *Islanded Identities, Constructions of Postcolonial Cultural Insularity, Cross/Cultures*, Volume: 139, https://doi.org/10.1163/9789401206938_004 Victorian Disaster Poetry: Altick, RD (1960) Four Victorian Poets and an Exploding Island, *Victorian Studies*, Vol. 3, No. 3 (Mar., 1960), pp. 249-260 (12 pages), <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3825498> 2.

We thank the reviewer for bringing these works to our attention. We have now cited them in the Introduction.

2. Introduction: there are over 1400 'active volcanoes' and 50 – 60 in eruption in any given year (Smithsonian GVP catalogue; <https://volcano.si.edu/>); the areal footprint of an eruption doesn't scale in a simple way with VEI; and the reporting of past eruptions was much more about where they occurred, than their size: every burst of activity at Vesuvius was reported from the eighteenth century and on; meanwhile, the effects of the 'great eruption of Tambora' was barely known about until decades later.

This is a good point, and we have now incorporated it on p.3 l.7

3. Page 3 line 42 – see also: Hamilton, J., 2012, *Volcano: nature and culture*. Reaktion Books, London, 2012; Alexander, D., 2016, The portrayal of disaster in Western fine art, *Environmental Hazards*, Volume 15, Pages 209-226, <https://doi.org/10.1080/17477891.2016.1173007> 4.

[Printer-friendly version](#)[Discussion paper](#)

We thank the reviewer for suggesting these works – we have referenced them.

4. Page 4 line 4 – ‘vog’ is a localised or tropospheric phenomenon; most of the sunset colours are a consequence of stratospheric particulates.

Indeed. We thank the reviewer for catching this mistake, which we have now rectified.

5. Page 5, line 17 – it would be of considerable value to also have an appendix to the paper that lists the poems in this study.

We created a DOI that contains this information. It is open access, and is now more clearly signposted in the manuscript.

6. Results and discussion: it would be worthwhile analysing where and by whom the poems were written?

Yes, that will be the subject of a follow up study. We have already started gathering the relevant information, and we are looking forward to developing this research further once this first study is published.

7. Page 11, line 27 – it’s not quite true that La Soufriere ‘dominates’ the physical landscape of St Vincent; it can hardly be seen from most of the island. I’d agree that it dominates the metaphorical landscape.

Thank you for pointing out the need for clarification, we have now specified the metaphorical connotation of that sentence.

8. Page 15, line 13 – it is interesting that you chose to focus on the Christian element of the tale of St Telemachus’ death; a more obvious volcano link comes from the opening lines ‘HAD the fierce ashes of some fiery peak / Been hurl’d so high they ranged about the globe?’ which refer to the eruption of Krakatoa.

We coded everything in the poem, as can be seen in the supplementary material. In this section we are just providing examples of the different emerging categories. For “spiritual”, St. Telemachus contains a representative one, which we chose to highlight.

[Printer-friendly version](#)[Discussion paper](#)

9. Page 17, line 8; page 19 line 11 – in 1816 Byron would not have known that the dismal weather had a volcanic cause; this didn't become known until decades later, and the eruption of Krakatoa. Here the 'mountain-torch' is a reference to the way that Byron imagined a volcano might light up the gloom.

We agree that thus point needed clarification, which we have now provided. We found it interesting that, although Byron didn't know the cause, he felt this way about the consequences.

10. Table 5 – this is a curious list. Tambora and Krakatoa are both in the southern hemisphere (but had global effects); and the list of eruptions is (surely) far from complete – even at a threshold of VEI 5 (e.g. Cosiguina, Nicaragua, 1835; El Chichon, Mexico, 1982), What about Hekla? And other major eruptions of Vesuvius?

Yes, this is not a complete list of all volcanic eruptions that occurred over the considered time span, not even with a VEI 5 threshold. We compiled this list keeping in mind the impact (including the mediatic resonance) that these eruptions would have had. For example, as the reviewer notes, two eruptions occurred in the southern hemisphere, but had global effects, and in fact they were written about by poets. We have added the El Chichon and Hekla eruptions to the list. We have also rephrased the Table caption, which was misleading.

11. It might be appropriate to follow standard procedure for citing poems, by referring to the line numbers in the excerpts?

Given that this study is submitted for consideration to a Geoscience journal, and that all cited excerpts are provided in-text, we have not made this addition.

Interactive comment on Geosci. Commun. Discuss., <https://doi.org/10.5194/gc-2019-17>, 2019.

Printer-friendly version

Discussion paper

