

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

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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 the present day. Of the twelve

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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).

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? 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.

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](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. (page 3) 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 foot-

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print 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.

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

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.

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

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.

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.

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.

10. Table 5 – this is a curious list. Tambora and Krakatoa are both in the southern

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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?

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

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

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