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Recentering the Peripheral: An Event-Based Ecocritical Methodology for World Literature

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Abstract: This article presents an original methodology of world literature that draws upon ecocritical thought to rescale and recenter literary networks. Working particularly to unsettle the center-periphery model of world systems theory, an ecocritical study of world literature turns to more-than-human scales and forces. It asks that we take our cues from world-shattering or world-shaping ecological events and work outward to track how these events influence cultural and literary life across national, regional, imperial, and even planetary boundaries. After proposing assemblage as a primary technique for conducting an event-based literary study, the article demonstrates this methodology in a culminating analysis of literary representations, through various genres and forms, of the 1883 Krakatoa volcanic eruption.

Keywords: world literature, ecocriticism, event, Krakatoa, Anthropocene

An uninhabited volcanic island may seem unlikely as a center for the study of world literature, but the 1883 eruption of Krakatoa in the Sunda Strait generated literary production as global as its devastating effects. Still smoldering, the island had already begun its transformation into a literary subject. Prose and poetry produced in the immediate aftermath captured the horrors of the resultant tsunami with a death toll of over 36,000, while even those situated thousands of miles away could attest to the mammoth waves and explosive sound that traveled far beyond the site of the eruption (Morgan 2013, 1). As Krakatoa's atmosphere-altering effects lingered for years in the form of vivid crimson sunsets and drastic dips in global temperature, authors working within a range of languages and genres continued to immortalize the volcano.

This article draws on ecocriticism to make an intervention in the field of world literature such that even an isolated, unpopulated place like Krakatoa could constitute a literary center. My own proposal is to focus on world-shattering or world-shaping ecological events and to work outward from them, tracking the ways that these events influence cultural and literary life across national,

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regional, imperial, and planetary boundaries. As questions of scale saturate Anthropocene rhetoric, ecocritics and scholars of world literature have been thinking about shapings of the world that move well beyond the nation. Though these fields tend to be approached discretely, their potential congruences offer productive models for recentering scholarship to accommodate global, geological, and more-than-human forces. Into world literature studies, a field wrestling with Eurocentrism, I inject ecocritical inroads that offer new centers by allowing the ecological event, a nonhuman entity, to dictate the center of literary and cultural production. By giving nature an agency in the formation of world cultures, this methodology embraces scales that deemphasize human time and human space, urging us to consider our place within an expansive, intricately networked ecosystem. To explicate this original theory, I will first offer an overview of crucial influences within world literary studies and explore their intersections with ecocriticism. Next, I will approach theorizations of the event more broadly before moving to the specifically ecological event. An ensuing section offers examples of an assemblage-based methodology for conducting this sort of study, and the article subsequently culminates with an exemplary analysis of world literary production resulting from the Krakatoa eruption.

Junctures of World Literature and Ecocriticism

Dovetailing and diverging, world literature theories present a multitude of approaches to the problem of undertaking work in a seemingly boundless field. The variety of innovative propositions might best be read as offering “rather different concrete answers, emerging in specific contexts, to the same set of problems about the interactions between literatures and their environments” (Beecroft 2015, 3). Some of the most important work troubles categorical boundaries, from putting pressure on terms that many may take for granted (e. g. what is a world, and what is literature?) to reshaping such influential yet reductive early theories as Goethe’s case for *Weltliteratur* (Damrosch 2003, 1). Especially compelling, I argue, are projects that, as with ecocritical approaches to the global system, resist the impulse to privilege the western metropole and propose new temporalities through which to interpret world literature.

My methodology particularly seeks to unsettle the center-periphery model of world systems theory, which routinely invites hierarchical, Eurocentric thought that allows only select texts, or types of texts, to be promulgated beyond their sites of origin. Pascale Casanova, for one, conceives of the literary world “as a

system in which the literatures of the periphery are linked to the center by polyglots and translators” (2004, 20–1) that tends to be organized around western literary capitals. On a similar note, Franco Moretti, whom I cite here for his influence in the field of world literature, offers a critical approach that explores “a system that is simultaneously *one*, and *unequal*: with a core, and a periphery (and a semiperiphery) that are bound together in a relationship of growing inequality” (2000, 55–6).

Moretti dismisses Efraim Kristal’s capacious vision of world literature “in which the West does not have a monopoly over the creation of forms that count; in which themes and forms can move in several directions – from the centre to the periphery, from the periphery to the centre, from one periphery to another, while some original forms of consequence may not move much at all” (quoted in Moretti 2003, 75). Instead, Moretti draws upon distant reading to claim that “Theories will never abolish inequality: they can only hope to explain it” (2003, 77)

Yet as many recent theories demonstrate, and as my application of ecocriticism to world literature attempts to work toward, scholarship can and must resist systems of inequality.

Turning away from Eurocentric models, David Damrosch attends not to centers and peripheries but, rather, argues for world literature as a form of circulation (2003, 5). He effectively interrogates the mediation between two popular practices in literary criticism: “broad, but often reductive, overviews and intensive, but often atomistic, close readings” (2003, 26). Acknowledging the range of analytical possibilities and scales available to scholars of world literature who work within various cultural and linguistic traditions, Damrosch fixates on techniques for negotiation, developing the notion of “an elliptical approach” that allows for both “a self-centered construction of the world and a radically decentered one” (2003, 133). This elliptical model offers an important tool for thinking across multiple scales, a key technique for living within and even surviving the Anthropocene.

As the elliptical approach demonstrates, world literature methodologies at their best must be malleable enough to accommodate multiple analytical modes. Damrosch likewise endorses literature’s categorical fluidity, as evidenced by world literature anthologies that embrace not only written works from a variety of genres and traditions, but also orally transmitted works (“orature”), which, he claims, “are not even literature in the root sense of a written text” (2003, 128). Eric Hayot likewise troubles the term “literature,” mentioning his concern that it connotes “the universalizing vision of a European concept inappropriate to the analysis of texts and stories operating under radically different conceptions of the meaning of writing or storytelling” (2012, 35). As a solution, Hayot suggests that we reconfigure our understanding of literature by “generating a large-scale master

term” that speaks to “The broadest possible conception of world literature” (2012, 35). The generosity that Damrosch and Hayot grant literature undergirds my own theory, which seeks to embrace as many modes of literature – written or oral – as can usefully contribute to the narrative shaping of an event.

Just as “literature” must be unsettled, so must conceptions of “world.” Pheng Cheah further defamiliarizes putative terminology in his aptly titled *What Is a World?* (2016). Cheah recognizes the preponderance of recent world literature theories that look beyond western boundaries, but critiques contemporary globalization as having “exacerbated the problem of worldlessness” in prioritizing the general concept of inclusion over the precise “manner of inclusion and the kind of whole that is created” (2016, 192). In particular, he pushes against previous emphases on circulation to forward his argument for the world as “a normative temporal category and not the spatial whole made by globalization,” as well as for world literature’s “normative vocation of opening new worlds” (2016, 16). Cheah’s embrace of multiplicity intrepidly undermines Eurocentrism while maintaining a worlding structure.

The call to adjust our conceptions of temporality continues into more explicitly ecological approaches to world literary studies, provoking discussions of how to balance minute human timescales with vast swaths of geological time. Rethinking what “world” signifies in a more ecological sense, Emily Apter avers the need “to wean World Literature from its comfort zone ... by pressing on what a world is” (2013, 335). Her conclusion gestures toward an ecological awareness that “theories of cosmos/*nomos*, planetarity, world depression or dysphoria, and premonition of earthly extinction ... advocate a shift in the status of the word ‘world’ in World Literature” (2013, 335). In contrast with Cheah’s critique of globalizing systems, I situate my own understanding of the – or *a* – world more in line with the planetary concept that Apter, Susan Stanford Friedman, and Wai Chee Dimock promote. Planetarity proves central to Friedman’s innovative *Planetary Modernisms* (2015), which explores the rupture of modernity and envisions world literature as a practice of relationality that imagines “encounters with other societies and civilizations, encounters that are transcultural, not unidirectional” (2015, 62). Ideally, thinking in a planetary mode would directly oppose toxic forces such as cultural appropriation (writes Friedman, “Who, we must ask, is derivative of whom?” [2015, 66]), stringent periodization that hails from the Western tradition, and a scalar expansion of spatiotemporal understandings. Furthermore, by encouraging the contemplation of this grander scale, the planetary model offers a convincing bridge between world literature theories and ecocriticism that looks beyond the restricted temporality of the human. Another proponent of planetarity, Dimock emphasizes scalar expansion in proposing to analyze literature’s “complex tangle of relations” through the concept of deep time, “at once projective and recessional, with input going both ways, and

binding continents and millennia into many loops of relations, a densely interactive fabric” (2006, 3–4). Through these planetary lenses, reading national literature alone proves nearly impossible; texts demand to be interpreted in relation to a network of linguistic, geographical, and temporal others.

Incorporating broader timescales and ecological thought into world literature theories proves strikingly apt, then, if we join this planetarity to the fluid and inclusive brand of literature that Damrosch and Hayot endorse. From an ecological perspective, forwards Alexander Beecroft in *An Ecology of World Literature*, “we can see that different literatures over time have thrived in different ways. Oral transmission and circulation has allowed for verbal art to thrive for centuries, or even longer” (2015, 20). From its title alone, in fact, Beecroft’s text offers ample evidence that ecology can prove a suitable analogue for world literature. His most unique contribution to this discourse, which also serves as a rejoinder to concerns of categorical limitations that national literature studies and periodization generate, comes in his explication of biomes, recognized in ecology as diverse environments within large-scale ecozones. Beecroft proposes that we identify *literary* biomes, or “particular patterns of ecological constraints operating on the circulation of literary texts in a variety of different historical contexts,” in order to consider “how literature circulates, what sorts of constraints operate on that circulation, and how particular literary communities respond to those constraints” (2015, 25). Rhetoric aside, however, this book is distinctly not a work of ecocriticism; from the outset, Beecroft forwards the caveat that his conception of “ecology” falls more along the lines of linguistic ecology and media ecology rather than parsing human-environmental interactions (2015, 20–1).

While Beecroft’s thoughtful and singular approach offers one inroad to wedding ecological thought with world literature theory, I turn here to a more explicitly ecocritical framework that can inspire alternate shapings of the field. In particular, I hope to counter a trend that Damrosch recognizes in his claim that, “From the start, constructions of world literature have always been motivated by a mixture of public concern and private pleasure” (2003, 118). Such private pleasure often manifests in the tendency to draw upon texts written in a few choice languages, which, while ostensibly rational considering the restraints of linguistic mastery, invites subjectivity that seems at odds with the field’s drive towards inclusive thought. Hence, to reflect the more fluid planetary scale, my ecologically-informed methodology of world literature takes its cue from an event rather than stemming from a work of literature, an author, or a nation. This project takes up salient issues that Friedman addresses and imbues them with a structure that resists globalization, as Cheah calls for, while gesturing toward the more-than-human world. Transcending the boundaries of Earth itself and oscillating between the microscopic and the macroscopic, the planetary event “opens up the possibility of thinking about nonhuman modernities or the

interconnections of the human and nonhuman in rethinking modernity and modernism” (Friedman 2015, 8). Following on Dimock’s terminology of deep time, Friedman raises a compelling set of questions:

Planetary in its very name invokes the Earth in deep time. Does the planet have its own modernities, crises distinct from those of the human species? ... The Earth moves in a scale of time almost unimaginable in human terms, although we attempt to name its ages and periodize its changes, often cataclysmic ones. How might we conceptualize modernity anew in the context of the Earth’s and many of its species’ indifference to the human? (2015, 78)

Given the broader scale that the Earth’s temporality demands, and recognizing how this scale renders inadequate our attempts to periodize everything from literature to human history, I propose that we take our cues from events that spill over national borders, and whose effects linger for years, decades, centuries, or even millennia. As a counter to the center-periphery model, I seek an expansive understanding of literary cultural transmission that resists the historical centrality of the European metropolis and recenters the sheer notion of a center. Rather than using financial or colonial prowess to determine a hub of cultural production, this new methodology employs an event in structuring the center from which we branch out.

The Event

Turning to the event provides the ability to navigate between individual narratives and concepts that supersede human comprehension of space and time. Studies of catastrophe and disaster, which often verge into one or both of the aforementioned theoretical fields, serve as a crucial inspiration for this project, though an event need not be a disaster. In her work on disaster narratives, Marie-Hélène Huet writes, “individual lives tend to become an abstract concept, lost in the sheer magnitude of the loss ... the group takes over the private subject” (2012, 201). Such abstractions engender desensitization; often, it is only courtesy of encountering a major event or its narrative retelling that concern manifests in activism. Huet addresses this phenomenon in the context of traumatic current events as reported in the media, praising those who “fight the spreading of anonymity that makes all victims alike: by focusing on a grieving family or a single ruined school, [news reporters] restore individual voices to the inhuman aftermath of disastrous events” (2012, 20). Similarly, in theorizing the narration of catastrophe, Mark Anderson contends that “Individual and collective experiences of specific disasters ... cannot be left in abstract terms” (2011, 6). For a catastrophic event, “localized ... interpretations must be collectivized and incorporated into a historical framework” and then

“negotiated through dialogue with existing local traditions as well as broader national and globalized frameworks of knowledge” to articulate experiences both individual and collective (Anderson 2011, 6). As these studies of disaster narratives illustrate, grappling with significant events demands a process of negotiation that imbricates greater scales of geography and history with the personal.

Defining “event” does, however, create a particular challenge when engaging timescales that range from the human to the geological. In one sense, I draw from Alain Badiou’s *Being and Event* (2005), which emphasizes the essence of an event’s locality. Writes Badiou, “The event is attached, in its very definition, to the place, to the point, in which the historicity of the situation is concentrated. Every event has a site which can be singularized in a historical situation” (2005, 178–9). Several conditions accompany this assertion: namely, that the site itself cannot name the event, “even if it serves to circumscribe and qualify,” which Badiou instructively exemplifies with the French Revolution of 1789 (2005, 203). This revolution “is certainly ‘French’, yet France is not what engendered and named its eventness. It is much rather the case that it is the revolution which has since retroactively given meaning ... to that historical situation that we call France” (Badiou 2005, 203). If France is itself a specific historical condition both before and after 1789, then the event-determining revolution accords with a rupture, or some happening out of the ordinary. Despite the revolution’s localized geography, it would conform with my notion of an event worth studying through its resultant literary legacy, for its impact transcended purely national boundaries and, indeed, still continues to color contemporary cultural references. Nevertheless, a revolution is not the sole possibility for a major event; other categories could include, for instance, a famine or a significant political election – anything with a large-scale impact.

The question of an event’s singularity remains of particular interest as well. In “Signature Event Context” (Derrida 1988), Jacques Derrida parses an event’s potential for iterability and reproducibility. Derrida queries, “would a performative utterance be possible if a citational doubling [*doublure*] did not come to split and dissociate from itself the pure singularity of the event?” (1988, 17). The temporality of the event proves difficult to pin down. Ian Baucom further probes this possibility in *Specters of the Atlantic* (2005), a searching approach to the literary counterarchive ensuing from the 1781 *Zong* massacre. Baucom stresses the need to pivot from the theoretical to the literal: “from the form of *the* event, *the* image, decision, sign, to what is also under discussion here: *an* image, *an* event, *a* symptomatic anomaly” (2005, 123). Keenly aware of the massacre’s death toll of 133, Baucom weighs the numerical toll against the singularity of the event itself: given

our willingness to recognize that this is also a singular and a melancholy event, or, perhaps more accurately, a melancholy conjunction of singular atrocities, ... the number we need to find some way to comprehend is neither one hundred thirty-three nor one hundred thirty-two but one, one, one. (2005, 130)

In yet another complex engagement with scale and time, he later turns to Derrida on the concept of bearing witness through observation and transmission that ultimately results in the ability “to serialize the event and its affect and also to elongate its temporality, to stretch its time along the line of an unfolding series of moments of bearing witness” (2005, 177). Even if we take the event to be a single occurrence at a localized place, then, its singularity becomes muddled; *the* revolution stands in contrast with *a* revolution, while a specific event lingers in its effects and in our imagination, becoming infinitely elongated and serialized.

At the root of this (reverse) chronology of evental theorization lies Karl Marx, who introduces foundational notions of an event’s classification and scale in *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* (Marx 1991). In introducing the French revolution of 1848, he writes, “An entire people ... suddenly finds itself set back into a defunct epoch and, in order that no doubt as to the relapse may be possible, the old dates arise again, the old chronology, the old names, the old edicts” (1991, 17). Shortly thereafter, however, Marx explains,

The social revolution of the nineteenth century cannot draw its poetry from the past, but only from the future ... Earlier revolutions required collections of past world history in order to drug themselves concerning their own content. In order to arrive at its own content, the revolution of the nineteenth century must let the dead bury their dead. (1991, 18)

This particular revolution, then, occupies an unsettled timespace. It looks both backwards and forwards, dredging up the past and eyeing the future. The revolutionary occurrence recalls prior revolutions and world historical events, linking 1848 with preceding decades and centuries, while its very name inspires calls to a new order, to futurity.

Into this set of temporal associations enters the impulse to concomitantly seek rupture and continuity within an event. Marx breaks down the three main periods of the revolution into “unmistakable” categories:

the February period; May 4, 1848, to May 28, 1849: the period of the constitution of the republic, or of the Constituent National Assembly; May 28, 1849, to December 2, 1851: the period of the constitutional republic or of the Legislative National Assembly. (1991, 21)

Each of these periods could well be considered a singular event in its own right; together, however, they make up another “whole” event: the revolution. Yet the iterability of an event – its transformation in tenor – means that even this

revolution does not necessarily constitute an isolated occurrence. Apter contributes to the discussion of convoluted historical temporalities, calling upon Badiou to suggest that “untiming takes the form of *sequences* broken up by temporal intervals that disable linear history” (Apter 2013, 64). Just as multiple events of different spans can be layered upon one another, so can temporal disruption and linearity coexist chaotically.

To gather all of this together, then, I understand by the event a specific, disruptive, place-based occurrence that can be narrated. An event could be approached as a singular entity, divided into smaller or shorter stages, or strung along in a sequence with other events. What every event must share is an effect that travels outward and that transcends the immediate temporality of the original occurrence. Drawing on my initial urge to rethink the center-periphery model by turning to more-than-human scales and forces, the event for the purposes of this ecocritical world literary study should be distinctly ecological. At our historical juncture, delineating between nature and culture has grown increasingly tricky. Concluding a compelling study of environmental disaster vis-à-vis colonial poetry, Sonya Posmentier explains that, although her efforts have been largely limited to

catastrophes that nature causes (or at least seems to cause): floods and hurricanes as opposed to acts of terror, holocausts, oil spills, or nuclear accidents ... the Haiti earthquake and Hurricane Katrina were ‘social disasters’ insofar as they revealed and intensified racial, economic, and global inequities, blurring the boundary between human and natural agency. (2017, 213–14)

Likewise, Anderson underscores “the intersection of natural hazards such as earthquakes, hurricanes, and volcanic eruptions with human populations in varying states of economic, social, and cultural vulnerability,” such that “‘natural’ disasters embody yet another facet of human interaction with the environment and as such must be mediated through culture” (2011, 1). Even so-called “natural” disasters result in devastating cultural effects, while on the converse, the mere fact that we are inhabiting the Anthropocene renders those “non-natural” catastrophes to which Posmentier refers acts of a human geological agent. It is imperative to acknowledge that just as volcanic eruptions and tsunamis influence natural and cultural environments, so too do those that are anthropogenic, from industrial pollution to oil spills. Thus, whether an ecological event originates from natural or anthropogenic sources – or from both – it must, in some manner, speak to a more-than-human agency.

Global warming poses perhaps the greatest challenge in thinking the event ecologically. What do we do with a concept that so greatly exceeds human scales of space and time as to be practically unnarratable? Though it bears repeating that

“event,” in my terminology, is not necessarily synonymous with “disaster,” Rob Nixon productively puzzles through the potential to narrate acts of “slow violence,” such as global warming, that may not have the “visceral, eye-catching and page-turning power” of an avalanche, a fire, a tsunami (2011, 3). Nixon establishes the stakes of this scalar shift by considering the relative narratabilities of different disasters:

In an age when the media venerate the spectacular, when public policy is shaped primarily around perceived immediate need, a central question is strategic and representational: how can we convert into image and narrative the disasters that are slow moving and long in the making, disasters that are anonymous and that star nobody, disasters that are attritional and of indifferent interest to the sensation-driven technologies of our image-world? (2011, 3)

These acts of slow violence that trouble conventional understandings of environmental and other large-scale traumas “overspill clear boundaries in time and space” (2011, 7); they invite questions about the very suitability of fiction as a container for such concepts. Amitav Ghosh avers that climate change figures in nonfiction much more than novels or short stories, and that the rare fictional genres (such as science fiction) that do take it up tend to be dismissed by “serious” literary publications (2016, 7). Are some experiences inherently better suited to literature than others? According to Ursula Heise, “climate change poses a challenge for narrative and lyrical forms that have conventionally focused above all on individuals, families, or nations, since it requires the articulation of connections between events at vastly different scales” (2008, 205). If narrative proves unable to convey the urgency of global warming, a phenomenon diffuse and slow-moving on the human, though not the geological, scale, it may best be represented narratively as a series of connected sensational moments. The deeply networked Anthropocene demands the power of collectivity, asking us to harness multiple world literatures, geographies, temporalities, and even, perhaps, events.

Methodologies of Assemblage

Literary study allows us to collect responses, whether narrative or otherwise, to an event that take it up both within the immediate aftermath and much later. What do aesthetic forms tell us about how an event was received? Do these forms shift as the years go on? How do stories or poems transform between narratives produced at the evental site and those created thousands of miles away? What sense can we make of a massive event mediated through individual narratives? Whether a particular

study necessitates the linkage of multiple, related ruptures or the serialization of a single instant through a range of temporally separated accounts, this methodology can be fitted to suit custom time spans and geographical spaces. Here, I propose some techniques for carrying out the study of ecological world literature.

Concepts of multiplicity that accompany a large-scale event resonate especially with planetary thought. As Dimock suggests, “the world is ‘rhizomatic’ ..., with many levels of grafting and mixing, generating linguistic kinships across vast distances and across the Western/non-Western divide” (2006, 143). Friedman, in fact, takes this notion a step further in implementing “collage” as one of her “four strategies for reading in planetary mode.” Per her definition, “*Collage* is the archive of radical juxtaposition, the scholar’s act of paratactic cutting and pasting. It establishes a montage of differences where the putting side by side illuminates these differences at the same time that it spotlights commonalities” (2015, 77). Collage gains particular traction for its “nonhierarchical act of comparison, a joining that illuminates both commensurabilities and incommensurabilities” (Friedman 2015, 77). The potential success of parataxis as a critical mode for exploring an ecological event (in this case, a disaster) appears likewise in Anahid Nersessian’s inventive coinage of “calamity form” (2013). Nersessian proposes, “A formalism committed to parataxis as a method might renew historicist inquiry by rethinking not how we define literary periods but how we put them into conversation with one another” (2013, 326). Such techniques of assembly as montage, collage, and parataxis, when it comes to accumulating a collection of literature, thus allow for the transcendence of spatial and temporal boundaries for which my own theory calls.

Assemblage, moreover, registers as a distinctly environmental methodology when considering profoundly interconnected global ecologies. In this vein, Heise notes her intent to parse texts that

attempt to develop aesthetic forms that do justice both to the sense that places are inexorably connected to the planet as a whole and to the perception that this wholeness encompasses vast heterogeneities by imagining the global environment as a kind of collage in which all the parts are connected but also lead lives of their own. (2008, 64)

Heise’s formulation here presents an inroad to the salient concept of “deep ecology.” Contrasted with “shallow” approaches to environmentalism, which “take an instrumental approach to nature, arguing for preservation of natural resources only for the sake of humans,” deep ecology recognizes nature’s intrinsic importance and denotes a “shift from a human-centred to a nature-centred system of values” (Garrard 2012, 24). Such a value system that stems from and crystallizes around nature connotes the sort of interspecies dependency that Timothy Morton identifies as “an interobjective system” termed “the mesh” (2013, 83). References to this “mesh” proliferate within the ecocritical subgenre of materialist scholarship, as in

Serenella Iovino and Serpil Oppermann's identification of matter as "a material 'mesh' of meanings, properties, and processes, in which human and nonhuman players are interlocked in networks that produce undeniable signifying forces" (2014, 1–2). The systems of nature and culture are so interconnected that there can be "no simple juxtaposition or mirroring ..., but a combined 'mesh,'" or "a hybrid compound, congealing, to use Haraway's term, into naturecultures" (Iovino and Oppermann 2014, 5). Deep ecological thought thus elucidates the framework through which many large-scale events, even and perhaps especially those of anthropogenic origin, can be read in an environmental sense. Recentering our studies around the natural can, in fact, allow us to recenter our notion of what constitutes a center or a periphery. Assemblage provides an apt mode through which to interpret global systems of interconnectedness that underpin our relationship with the environment in which we are enmeshed – a relationship often manifested in natural and anthropogenic events alike.

Further, deep ecology can elucidate links between various events, even those considered to be separate entities. Huet narrates such connections, drawing together millennia of natural disasters:

Recent news of the eruption of Iceland's Eyjafjallajökull volcano, which disrupted air travel for days, only echoed the far more serious Laki eruption, which lasted from June 1783 to February 1784. The Laki eruption caused the deaths of several million people worldwide and is thought by some historians to have played a role in the hunger protests that led to the French Revolution. The powerful earthquake that hit the poorest country of the world, Haiti, on January 12, 2010, was a reminder of past disasters and past human failures to cope with them. (2012, 201)

As with Marx's analysis of the 1848 revolution, Huet's account places a single moment in time within a continuum of other major events. Her suggestion that one volcanic eruption serves largely to recall a past eruption brings to mind salient topics that occupy literary critics in the Anthropocene. In a claim that evokes Nixon's idea of slow violence, Stephanie LeMenager puzzles over the vast scale of climate change in juxtaposition with what she terms "the everyday Anthropocene" (2017, 223). The Anthropocene novel, LeMenager posits, offers value through its "project of paying close attention to what it means to live through climate shift, moment by moment, in individual, fragile bodies" (2017, 225). Indeed, her argument speaks to Anna Tsing's crucial point that, although "You cannot 'do' climate change in just one place," "None of us live in a global system; we live in places" (2016, 3). Given this tension between the local and the global, narratives pinned to specific sites and individuals are necessary to understand these more-than-human occurrences, to grasp and (re)construct large-scale events both of the past and of the current moment.

What might such an evental reconstruction look like? Despite the prior lack of a definitive theory of event-based world literature, several excellent scholarly works offer influential models for this manner of analysis, including Baucom's aforementioned scholarship on the *Zong* tragedy. Though his focus falls primarily on the eighteenth century, Baucom refers to contemporary writings about this text – including Fred D'Aguiar's novel *Feeding the Ghosts* (1999) and M. NourbeSe Philip's book-length poem *Zong!* (2008) – as products of “temporal accumulation” (2005, 34). Regardless of an event's duration, each major event reflected in literature thus has the capability of surpassing our customary spatial and temporal boundaries as we collect numerous resulting literary responses, or what Baucom calls a “counterarchive” (2005, 4). *Specters of the Atlantic*, contends Baucom, begins with a previously overlooked eighteenth-century letter concerning the massacre and, from there, “assembles a counterarchive, an archive that, over the past two hundred years, has collected itself around this piece of writing and the event whose history it attempts to write” (2005, 4). Baucom's archive amasses such disparate sources as letters, journalism, court records, Parliamentary speeches, art history essays, and treatises, which have all, “in some way or another, been party to, born upon, or found themselves haunted by the event whose news that initial, unacknowledged letter sought to communicate” (2005, 4).

Accumulating this sort of archive is imperative to our reconstruction of an event. Only by juxtaposing a slew of diverse narratives – narratives that offer varied perspectives on temporality, locality, and even reality – can we gain an appropriately expansive understanding of a large-scale occurrence. Making sense requires turning not only to historical archives, but also to fictional interpretations that reconstruct an event's persistence in the cultural imagination. In a narratological context within *The Novel as Event* (2010), Mario Ortiz Robles calls upon Gérard Genette's tripartite structure of “an order of events that constitute ‘lived’ reality; an order of events that, through their telling, are rendered into fiction; and the event of narrative itself” (36). My approach to the event relies primarily upon the relation of the first category to the second (though my methodology would certainly welcome an analysis of world literature centered on the event of *the* novel, or *a* novel with deep global impact). By constructing a relation between what Ortiz Robles terms “narrative and lived experience,” or “speech act and event,” the novel itself “organizes these events in the form of a triangular relay in which the act of narrating pivots the mimetic symmetry of real and represented events” (2010, 36). Both historical and fictional accounts of an event isolate narrative time from “real” time, proving equally suitable additions to an event-based archive. Ortiz Robles' discussion of textual temporality also bolsters the

case for expanding a literary archive beyond the time of the event itself. As Heise persuasively notes,

the literary texts that raise the most interesting cultural and linguistic issues in the representation of crisis and routine are those that focus on individuals who experience the crisis from far away in a highly mediated way, struggle to understand its consequences and translate their understanding into language and narrative form. (2008, 181)

Heise's philosophy encourages us to look outward in time and space as we interpret an event, to consider its large-scale and long-term impacts.

Reading Krakatoa as Ecological Event in World Literature

To model this sort of interpretation within an ecological context, I turn once more to Krakatoa, which lives on in the contemporary imagination due in no small part to the legendary range of its optic and sonic effects that traveled thousands of miles on and after August 26 and 27, 1883. In order to contextualize the global impact of this event, we begin our literary journey as close to the site of the eruption as possible and then travel outwards, mimicking the effects of the explosion itself. The parameters of a project based around this particular eruption, I must note, could take any number of forms. An analysis might attend solely to responses produced within several months of the eruption; it might circle back to draw comparisons with major eruptions of other volcanoes such as Laki (Iceland, 1784) or Tambora (Indonesia, 1815); it might reach forward to consider 20th-century narratives inspired by Krakatoa, such as William Pène du Bois' children's novel *The Twenty-One Balloons* (Pène Du Bois 1975). For this particular model, I have gathered written works produced within just over a decade of the eruption, the precise time frame spanning 1883 through 1894. This will allow me to construct a literary-cultural atmosphere of relative immediacy, examining newspaper articles synchronous with the eruption alongside novels produced at a geographical remove and over a significantly longer timespan. The framework of world literature fills in crucial scholarly gaps, as most extant literary scholarship in English arrives at Krakatoa through European texts alone. An ecocritical perspective further helps expand this examination by linking temporally and geographically proximate sources with those from comparatively peripheral European countries.

The accounts of greatest immediacy hail, unsurprisingly, from eyewitnesses: coastal survivors (Java Coast, Sumatra Coast), sailors in the Straits of Sunda, and

residents of affected areas at a slightly farther remove (Batavia, Inland Java) (Simkin and Fiske 1983, 69). Though these stories have been preserved and collected in written form, a number began as oral narratives that priest and geologist Julian Tenison-Woods transcribed during his visits with survivors who lived on the coast between Merak and Anjer. Their descriptions of the “mountains high” waves that rendered Anjer “nothing but a foaming and furiously rushing flood above the surface of which only a couple of trees and tops of houses were visible” (Simkin and Fiske 1983, 79) finds an echo in accounts from several hundred kilometers away. In one such account, Dutch Public Works Engineer N.H. van Sandick, a passenger aboard the Batavian steamship *Gouverneur-Generaal Loudon*, describes multiple “colossal waves” that

destroyed all of Telok Betong right before our eyes. The light tower could be seen to tumble; the houses disappeared; the steamer *Berouw* was lifted and got stuck, apparently at the height of the cocoanut trees; and everything had become sea in front of our eyes, where a few minutes ago Telok Betong beach had been. (Simkin and Fiske 1983, 92)

From their separate positions of proximity, both accounts attest to the rapid flooding that transformed the landscape and the indescribable enormity of the tsunami waves, bespeaking the disaster’s sheer horror.

However, their reports of the aftermath offer telling differences. While van Sandick narrates from the vantage of his ship, recalling “a dense mud rain” that covered the deck and “A devilish smell of sulfurous acid,” he calls upon scientific instruments to summon the appropriate level of shock: “The compass showed the strangest deviations” and “The barometer meanwhile read very high, which certainly was difficult to explain” (Simkin and Fiske 1983, 94). The anonymous survivor, however, recalls the trauma on land where Anjer was no longer:

what a sight met my half stupefied gaze. It was a scene of the utmost confusion. Immense quantities of broken furniture, beams, broken earthenware, amid human corpses formed heaps and masses on every side; I crept on my knees over the ruins and the dead, often entangled amid corpses. (Simkin and Fiske 1983, 79)

This narrative proves deeply visceral and much more grotesque, painting the picture of a stunned survivor physically entangled with the dead that van Sandick’s objective, empirical stance cannot approach, despite their similar descriptions of the tsunami itself.

While the previous narratives appear in rather standard prose, another account from the center relies on a distinct aesthetic form, the poetic *syair*, to convey information. Written by Muhammad Saleh, a resident of southern Sumatra, *Syair Lampung Karam* (*The Tale of Lampung Submerged*) is the only surviving account of the eruption by a Malay eyewitness (McGlynn 2014, vii). Initially published in 1883

with three editions to follow in the next five years, *Syair Lampung Karam*'s popularity was short-lived, perhaps due to the fact that few could read the Jawi script in which it was written (McGlynn and Suryadi 2014, xi). The form of the poem suggests that it may have been a likely candidate for oral tradition (McGlynn and Suryadi 2014, xxix): each four-line stanza has an AAAA rhyme scheme, rendering it possible to memorize. (As this might prove rather unwieldy in English, John McGlynn's translated stanzas consist of two couplets: AABB. The translation likewise alters the poem's original metric pattern.) And memorization would have been key, for the genre was often used to disseminate news, as well as to provide religious instruction (McGlynn and Suryadi 2014, vii). Much like the previously cited survivor's account, Saleh's is saturated with graphic descriptions:

People were in wretched shape,
Drenched with blood and wounds agape.
Struck by the wave, many people lost their voice,
But to live, running was the only choice. (Saleh 2014, 17)

Saleh spares no grotesque detail. He conjures the event in vivid terms as we relive and confront its horrific impact, and as the *syair* continues, Saleh moves away from transcribing his own experience and tasks himself with recounting others' equally graphic tales: "The number of stories told to me was great,/And of the many but a few will I relate" (37). This poem provides particular salience, then, in its articulation of dozens of successive perspectives. Saleh's catalogue of the human death toll and environmental destruction proceeds town by town and ultimately laments the sheer number of tales that remain untold:

As to the story I have told in this *syair*,
There is very little else I can state here.
Only one tale in ten am I able to depict,
A fault that is due to my own feeble wit.
Because I speak of more universal suffering,
In regional languages, I say next to nothing.
Not in Bengkulu, Lampung, or even Banten,
Tis the final word that must not be forgotten. (Saleh 2014, 123)

Like the other eyewitness accounts, this *syair* narrates the eruption's destruction and violence, but Saleh goes beyond his own experience, calling attention to a hierarchy that privileges a certain type of language and narrative. With the omission of orature and tales told in regional languages, what stories remain untold?

Responses from the heart of the eruption evince horror, trauma, and disbelief, but the tenor of the event shifts in telling ways as we travel away from the site of

impact. From European countries peripheral to the island of Krakatoa come two novels engaging explicitly with the eruption, whether as a key plot point or a minor note of comparison: Scottish writer R.M. Ballantyne's 1889 *Blown to Bits: or, the Lonely Man of Rakata* and French astronomer and author Camille Flammarion's 1894 *La Fin du Mond* (known in English as *Omega: The Last Days of the World*). The work of these novels varies substantially from that of Saleh's *syair*; in fact, from a generic standpoint, novels produced within imperial contexts are often mired in colonialist discourse, espousing a Eurocentric perspective (Esty 2012). In addition to their authors' spatial distance from the event, the form of these novels, too, necessitates substantial temporal remove from August of 1883. Examining them as part of the Krakatoa archive alongside the eyewitness reports thus allows us to continue developing an understanding of the disaster's global cultural impact while remaining cognizant of their less immediate positions.

Ballantyne's *Blown to Bits* contains the clearest reverberations of the event. The volcanic action of 1883 largely structures the plot, which centers around a young man named Nigel and his new friends who dwell in a cave on Krakatoa: the "hermit of Rakata" and his servant, Moses. Despite the fanciful nature of the adventure story, Ballantyne frequently draws sentences verbatim from the *Report of the Krakatoa Committee of the Royal Society* (1888), an extensive English scientific account (Miller 2008, 115). In contrast with the immediacy stressed within the eyewitness reports, *Blown to Bits* strays at times from the dramatic fictional tale in favor of painstaking historical accuracy. Interspersed between dramatic plot points and tales of exploration, thus, we encounter informative descriptions of the Malay Archipelago's social and physical landscape. For instance, as the adventurers travel to Telok Betong, which the narrator describes as "one of the severest sufferers by the eruption of 1883," the plot halts to detail the town's precise location, population, and political context (Ballantyne 1894, 315–16). Notably, although the devastating eruption has yet to occur at the diegetic level, Ballantyne's narrator writes from the novel's present, inviting us to occupy an omniscient position by gazing back upon the event.

Such acknowledgment of distance marks Ballantyne's work not only temporally, but also spatially. Despite the text's setting, he maintains a staunchly European narrative stance, both by incorporating text from the *Royal Society Report* and in locating the eruption's aftereffects. Drawing from the 1885 journal of Dutch geologist Rogier Verbeek, he emphasizes that the explosive shock "extended appreciably right round the world ... . The dust thus sent into the sky was of 'ultra-microscopic fineness,' and it travelled round and round the world in a westerly direction, producing those extraordinary sunsets and gorgeous effects and afterglows which became visible in the British Isles in the month of November following the eruption (Ballantyne 1894, 387). Here, Ballantyne whisks us away

from the scene's urgency and, in zooming outward to the global level, chronicles a British perspective of the afterglows that were not visible until the latter months of 1883. The novel contains effects both immediate and extended, local and global, mingling eyewitness reports with the detached perspective of a British scientist. Ballantyne further detracts from the gravity of the actual eruption as the volcano foregrounds the story's romance plot: Nigel falls in love with a young woman, and as they profess their feelings for one another to sound of the violent explosions, they simultaneously discover that the hermit is her long-lost father. Even while Ballantyne remains faithful to scientific accounts, he shifts the events into a melodramatic register. Spatially and temporally removed from the instant of the eruption, Ballantyne is able to take up Krakatoa in a fantastical way that accounts for its lasting global impact and excises much of the trauma.

The eruption sinks further into the fictional realm in Flammarion's *La Fin du Mond*. This work of apocalyptic science fiction set in the twenty-fifth century centers around the fear that a comet will fatally collide with Earth, and trained astronomer Flammarion draws briefly upon Krakatoa as an element of verisimilitude to complement the fictional comet. In a chapter cataloguing apocalyptic moments from history, the narrator brings in Krakatoa, describing the loss of:

... the four cities, Tjiringin, Merak, Telok-Betong and Anjer, and the entire population of the region, more than forty thousand souls. For a long time the progress of vessels was hindered by floating bodies inextricably interlaced; and human fingers, with their nails, and fragments of heads, with their hair were found in the stomachs of fishes ... . One eye-witness assures us that he would not again pass through such an experience for all the wealth that could be imagined. The sun was extinguished and death seemed to reign sovereign over nature. This eruption ... reached an altitude of twenty thousand meters, producing an atmospheric disturbance which made the circuit of the entire globe in thirty-five hours (the barometer fell four milometers in Paris even), and left for more than a year in the upper layers of the atmosphere a fine dust, which, illumined by the sun, gave rise to those magnificent twilight displays admired so much throughout the world. (Flammarion 1894, 160–2)

Like Ballantyne, Flammarion zeroes in on the climax of the event itself, drawing from eyewitness accounts and painting gruesome images of corpses afloat. Within sentences, however, the passage shifts back outward to consider the eruption's global impact. While Ballantyne fixates on Krakatoa's afterlife in the British Isles, Flammarion similarly privileges his native France, valorizing Paris, and its scientific instruments, as the central site of measurement. The moment of Krakatoa's eruption has already become a thing of the past, replaced by its attenuated aftereffects.

In a final example, reverberations of the eruption grow even fainter in English poetry. Arguing for Krakatoa's influence on the writing of Robert Bridges, Algernon Charles Swinburne, Gerard Manley Hopkins, and Alfred, Lord Tennyson, Richard

Altick analyzes a sampling of poems (and one remarkable letter) to demonstrate how the writers set aside the historical moment of the eruption altogether, focusing solely on the optic effects observed from half a world away. Whereas the previous narratives I've discussed focus on the 1883 event itself, regardless of its narrative role, these poems shift the sunsets back many centuries to provide a "lurid background" (Altick 1960, 253). In his 1885 verse narrative *Eros and Psyche*, for instance, Bridges works the sunsets into the classical age:

Broad and low down, where last the sun had been,
A wealth of orange gold was thickly shed,
And touching that a curtain pale of green,
Like apples are before their rinds grow red:
Then to the height the variable hue
Of rose and pink and crimson freaked with blue,
And olive-bordered clouds o'er lilac led. (qtd. in Altick 1960, 253–4)

Like Ballantyne, Bridges has fabricated none of this information: as in *Blown to Bits*, his description draws directly on evidence from the Royal Society's report (Altick 1960, 254). However, this engagement with the event calls upon the optic phenomena purely for an aesthetic, dramatic purpose – our faintest reverberation of all. And despite their shared classification as poetry, these verses and Saleh's syair could not be more different. While Saleh weaves an urgent tale of tragedy from eyewitness reports, Tennyson and Bridges reference the optic effects witnessed from afar, many months afterwards. Nowhere do we learn about the death toll or the giant waves, and nowhere does the word "Krakatoa" appear; rather, we are in distant pasts where the event of 1883 has yet to happen and manifests most prominently as an aesthetic and figurative experience.

With just this small sampling of literature, then, we have begun to work toward a narrative reconstruction of a global ecological event, tracking its resonances as they are transfigured across national and oceanic borders. This methodology affords the opportunity to read critically and closely texts that might not receive frequent scholarly attention, and to approach anew more familiar works. We can join various genres, languages, and cultural traditions, tracing the extent of this traumatic event from its moment of impact that renders its transformation into something distant, beautiful, and aesthetic as somewhat astonishing. This brief example aspires to recognize the singular narratives that retell the story of Krakatoa, ensuring that we do not lose sight of its initial trauma in the wake of more distanced responses to its global effects. And though this illustrative study spans just eleven years, it is worth inquiring how Krakatoa continues to transform in the literary imagination.

From the union of disparate texts to the expertise of translators, collectivity enables this sort of study across linguistic, regional, and generic boundaries. To continue in the manner of such collaboration, I make my final intervention in world literary studies, which is to invite the incorporation of mediums *beyond* literature. To turn once again to Baucom, I draw inspiration from his analysis of J.M.W. Turner's 1840 painting *Slavers Throwing Overboard the Dead and Dying, Typhoon Coming On*, which he terms

the canonical visual representation of the [Zong] event, the most famous representation to make it 'the subject of vision' in order that the belated or displaced historical spectator might indeed witness (and bear witness to) what he or she had not witnessed. (2005, 221)

Created at a temporal and spatial distance from the initial event, Baucom writes, the canvas "had survived the moment of its happening not simply as a catastrophic and melancholy truth event but as a sentimental fact, a factual fiction, a romantic tableaux, and a novelistic scene" (2005, 221). In the case of Krakatoa, just as the firsthand survivor's account and the novel work within radically different temporalities, so too do non-literary aesthetic forms require varying lengths of time to produce. We might, for instance, view the relationship between an eyewitness account and a novel as analogous to that between a photograph and a painting, in terms of the relative immediacy the former of each pair offers. Though no photographs of the 1883 eruption exist, the abundant pastels of William Ascroft engage with the distant optic effects with impressionistic rapidity. On November 26, 1883, he sketched six scenes over the course of about 78 minutes, tracking the rapid changes in the sunset he observed from Chelsea overlooking the Thames (Hamblyn 2012). Created ten years later, in 1893, Edvard Munch's famed *The Scream* purportedly draws upon the vivid post-eruption skies as well, though they appear in a less empirical Expressionist style (Hamblyn 2012). Examining Munch's canvas in light of this event affords the opportunity to revisit a famed work and to understand its ecological underpinnings, inspired in part by a volcanic eruption.

Event-based thinking can grant us room to study how a single occurrence gets folded up into a number of discourses, how aesthetic forms beyond orature and literature circulate and register events differently while, nevertheless, allowing us to return to the initial occurrence. By integrating such mediums as painting, sculpture, and film into the archive of an event, we can further comprehend its lasting impact, and even its ongoingness. My methodology of ecocritical world literature, it seems, is predicated on a series of "beyonds." Turning to events with extreme global and environmental impacts urges us to think beyond the region and beyond the human in ways that world literature sorely needs. By continuing to incorporate other mediums when relevant or

instructive, we can reach further toward assemblage and beyond disciplinary boundaries, continuing to transform fragments into wholes.

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