

# IL NEGRO DI SAINT-PIERRE (THE SAINT-PIERRE NEGRO)

Giovanni Pascoli

Analysis by Carlo Tirinanzi De Medici

Narrative Poem

Giovanni Pascoli's *Il negro di Saint-Pierre (The Saint-Pierre Negro)*, a narrative poem from *Odi e inni* (1906), transforms the 1902 eruption of Mount Pelée (Martinique) into a meditation on survival's moral void and divine indifference. Through Dantean form and first-person narration, Pascoli fuses historical tragedy and metaphysical reflection, exposing humanity's fragile coexistence with chance and death.

Year of Publication	1906
Publication Place	Bologna
Editor	Zanichelli
Entity	Mount Pelée
Collection	Odi e inni

## GEOLOGICAL ANALYSIS

### Volcano Mount Pelée

REAL EVENT

Time	1902
Location	Caribbeans (Lesser Antilles) France (Martinique, French West Indies)
Coordinates	14.810898, -61.166382
Base/Complex	Saint-Pierre, Martinique
Typology	Stratovolcano

Andesitic stratovolcano formed by subduction of the North American Plate beneath the Caribbean Plate. The volcano consists of stratified layers of pyroclastic rocks and lava flows accumulated over approximately 400,000 years (Gueugneau et al.; Boudon et al.).

#### Anthropization Level

Cities

Sea Coast

Country Houses

Source: Gueugneau et al.

Source: Gueugneau et al.

Source: Gueugneau et al.

Farming Areas

Correctional Facilities

Tourist Places

Source: Gueugneau et al.

Source: Gueugneau et al.

Source: Gueugneau et al.

## Volcanic eruption 1902 Mount Pelée eruption

REAL EVENT

Time	May, 8, 1902, 8:02 AM (main eruption)
Location	Carribbeans (Lesser Antilles) France (Martinique, French West Indies)
Coordinates	14.810898, -61.166382
Impacted Areas	Saint-Pierre, Prêcheur, Sainte-Philomène, Morne Rouge, Ajoupa-Bouillon, Basse-Pointe, Lorrain
Base/Complex	Mount Pelée

#### Typology

Explosive

The eruption was the basis for a new subtype of volcanic eruption, named peléan-type eruption, which is an explosive eruption characterized by pyroclastic density currents, lateral blasts, and dome collapse. VEI 4 eruption with mass eruption rate of  $10^8$  kg/s. Generated pyroclastic flows with temperatures of 200-400°C and velocities exceeding 160 km/h (Gueugneau et al.; Fisher and Heiken; Lacroix).

#### Volcano/Eruption Typology

Stratovolcano

#### Anthropization Level

Cities

Settlements

Source: Chrétien and Brousse

Source: Chrétien and Brousse

Villages

Agriculture Areas

Source: Chrétien and Brousse

Source: Chrétien and Brousse

Farming Areas

Sea Coast

Source: Chrétien and Brousse

Source: Chrétien and Brousse

#### Ecological Impacts

Changes In The Volcano's Shape

Complete sterilization of 58 km<sup>2</sup> area. Formation of the "Tower of Pelée" spine growing 15 meters daily. Fer-de-lance snakes and centipedes driven from mountain habitats caused 50 human deaths from bites before main eruption. Marine die-offs from pyroclastic flows entering sea. May 5 lahar triggered localized tsunami (Gueugneau et al.; Lacroix).

Physical Landscape Changes

Complete sterilization of 58 km<sup>2</sup> area. Formation of the "Tower of Pelée" spine growing 15 meters daily. Fer-de-lance snakes and centipedes driven from mountain habitats caused 50 human deaths

from bites before main eruption. Marine die-offs from pyroclastic flows entering sea. May 5 lahar triggered localized tsunami (Gueugneau et al.; Lacroix).

#### Destruction Of Plants

Complete sterilization of 58 km<sup>2</sup> area. Formation of the "Tower of Pelée" spine growing 15 meters daily. Fer-de-lance snakes and centipedes driven from mountain habitats caused 50 human deaths from bites before main eruption. Marine die-offs from pyroclastic flows entering sea. May 5 lahar triggered localized tsunami (Gueugneau et al.; Lacroix).

#### Destruction Of Animal Species

Complete sterilization of 58 km<sup>2</sup> area. Formation of the "Tower of Pelée" spine growing 15 meters daily. Fer-de-lance snakes and centipedes driven from mountain habitats caused 50 human deaths from bites before main eruption. Marine die-offs from pyroclastic flows entering sea. May 5 lahar triggered localized tsunami (Gueugneau et al.; Lacroix).

#### Atmospheric Changes

Complete sterilization of 58 km<sup>2</sup> area. Formation of the "Tower of Pelée" spine growing 15 meters daily. Fer-de-lance snakes and centipedes driven from mountain habitats caused 50 human deaths from bites before main eruption. Marine die-offs from pyroclastic flows entering sea. May 5 lahar triggered localized tsunami (Gueugneau et al.; Lacroix).

#### Tsunami

Complete sterilization of 58 km<sup>2</sup> area. Formation of the "Tower of Pelée" spine growing 15 meters daily. Fer-de-lance snakes and centipedes driven from mountain habitats caused 50 human deaths from bites before main eruption. Marine die-offs from pyroclastic flows entering sea. May 5 lahar triggered localized tsunami (Gueugneau et al.; Lacroix).

### Social Impacts

#### Deaths

Death toll estimated at 30,000 (Chrétien and Brousse). May 8 eruption killed approximately 29,000 in Saint-Pierre within minutes. Only 2 confirmed survivors from the city: Ludger Sylbaris and Léon Compère-Léandre. May 20 eruption killed 2,000 rescuers. August 30 destroyed Morne Rouge (800 dead) and other settlements. Total 1902-1905 casualties approximately 31,000. Complete destruction of infrastructure including 20 vessels in harbor (Gueugneau et al.; Fisher and Heiken; Lacroix; Perret).

#### Injuries

Death toll estimated at 30,000 (Chrétien and Brousse). May 8 eruption killed approximately 29,000 in Saint-Pierre within minutes. Only 2 confirmed survivors from the city: Ludger Sylbaris and Léon Compère-Léandre. May 20 eruption killed 2,000 rescuers. August 30 destroyed Morne Rouge (800 dead) and other settlements. Total 1902-1905 casualties approximately 31,000. Complete destruction of infrastructure including 20 vessels in harbor (Gueugneau et al.; Fisher and Heiken; Lacroix; Perret).

#### Destruction Of Goods/Commodities

Death toll estimated at 30,000 (Chrétien and Brousse). May 8 eruption killed approximately 29,000 in Saint-Pierre within minutes. Only 2 confirmed survivors from the city: Ludger Sylbaris and Léon Compère-Léandre. May 20 eruption killed 2,000 rescuers. August 30 destroyed Morne Rouge (800 dead) and other settlements. Total 1902-1905 casualties approximately 31,000. Complete destruction of infrastructure including 20 vessels in harbor (Gueugneau et al.; Fisher and Heiken; Lacroix; Perret).

#### Resource Depletion

Complete sterilization of 58 km<sup>2</sup> area. Death toll estimated at 30,000 (Chrétien and Brousse). May 8 eruption killed approximately 29,000 in Saint-Pierre within minutes. Only 2 confirmed survivors from the city: Ludger Sylbaris and Léon Compère-Léandre. May 20 eruption killed 2,000 rescuers. August 30 destroyed Morne Rouge (800 dead) and other settlements. Total 1902-1905 casualties approximately 31,000. Complete destruction of infrastructure including 20 vessels in harbor (Gueugneau et al.; Fisher and Heiken; Lacroix; Perret).

#### Destruction Of Dwellings

Death toll estimated at 30,000 (Chrétien and Brousse). May 8 eruption killed approximately 29,000 in Saint-Pierre within minutes. Only 2 confirmed survivors from the city: Ludger Sylbaris and Léon Compère-Léandre. May 20 eruption killed 2,000 rescuers. August 30 destroyed Morne Rouge (800 dead) and other settlements. Total 1902-1905 casualties approximately 31,000. Complete destruction of infrastructure including 20 vessels in harbor (Gueugneau et al.; Fisher and Heiken; Lacroix; Perret).

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#### Destruction Of Public Buildings

Death toll estimated at 30,000 (Chrétien and Brousse). May 8 eruption killed approximately 29,000 in Saint-Pierre within minutes. Only 2 confirmed survivors from the city: Ludger Sylbaris and Léon Compère-Léandre. May 20 eruption killed 2,000 rescuers. August 30 destroyed Morne Rouge (800 dead) and other settlements. Total 1902-1905 casualties approximately 31,000. Complete destruction of infrastructure including 20 vessels in harbor (Gueugneau et al.; Fisher and Heiken; Lacroix; Perret).

#### Destruction Of Facilities

Death toll estimated at 30,000 (Chrétien and Brousse). May 8 eruption killed approximately 29,000 in Saint-Pierre within minutes. Only 2 confirmed survivors from the city: Ludger Sylbaris and Léon Compère-Léandre. May 20 eruption killed 2,000 rescuers. August 30 destroyed Morne Rouge (800 dead) and other settlements. Total 1902-1905 casualties approximately 31,000. Complete destruction of infrastructure including 20 vessels in harbor (Gueugneau et al.; Fisher and Heiken; Lacroix; Perret).

#### Destruction Of Cultural Heritage (Materials And Sites)

Death toll estimated at 30,000 (Chrétien and Brousse). May 8 eruption killed approximately 29,000 in Saint-Pierre within minutes. Only 2 confirmed survivors from the city: Ludger Sylbaris and Léon Compère-Léandre. May 20 eruption killed 2,000 rescuers. August 30 destroyed Morne Rouge (800 dead) and other settlements. Total 1902-1905 casualties approximately 31,000. Complete destruction of infrastructure including 20 vessels in harbor (Gueugneau et al.; Fisher and Heiken; Lacroix; Perret).

#### Social Disruption

Death toll estimated at 30,000 (Chrétien and Brousse). May 8 eruption killed approximately 29,000 in Saint-Pierre within minutes. Only 2 confirmed survivors from the city: Ludger Sylbaris and Léon Compère-Léandre. May 20 eruption killed 2,000 rescuers. August 30 destroyed Morne Rouge (800 dead) and other settlements. Total 1902-1905 casualties approximately 31,000. Complete destruction of infrastructure including 20 vessels in harbor (Gueugneau et al.; Fisher and Heiken; Lacroix; Perret).

#### Trauma

Death toll estimated at 30,000 (Chrétien and Brousse). May 8 eruption killed approximately 29,000 in Saint-Pierre within minutes. Only 2 confirmed survivors from the city: Ludger Sylbaris and Léon Compère-Léandre. May 20 eruption killed 2,000 rescuers. August 30 destroyed Morne Rouge (800 dead) and other settlements. Total 1902-1905 casualties approximately 31,000. Complete destruction of infrastructure including 20 vessels in harbor (Gueugneau et al.; Fisher and Heiken; Lacroix; Perret).

#### Poverty

Death toll estimated at 30,000 (Chrétien and Brousse). May 8 eruption killed approximately 29,000 in Saint-Pierre within minutes. Only 2 confirmed survivors from the city: Ludger Sylbaris and Léon Compère-Léandre. May 20 eruption killed 2,000 rescuers. August 30 destroyed Morne Rouge (800 dead) and other settlements. Total 1902-1905 casualties approximately 31,000. Complete destruction of infrastructure including 20 vessels in harbor (Gueugneau et al.; Fisher and Heiken; Lacroix; Perret).

#### Diseases

Death toll estimated at 30,000 (Chrétien and Brousse). May 8 eruption killed approximately 29,000 in Saint-Pierre within minutes. Only 2 confirmed survivors from the city: Ludger Sylbaris and Léon Compère-Léandre. May 20 eruption killed 2,000 rescuers. August 30 destroyed Morne Rouge (800 dead) and other settlements. Total 1902-1905 casualties approximately 31,000. Complete destruction of infrastructure including 20 vessels in harbor (Gueugneau et al.; Fisher and Heiken; Lacroix; Perret).

#### Famine

Death toll estimated at 30,000 (Chrétien and Brousse). May 8 eruption killed approximately 29,000 in Saint-Pierre within minutes. Only 2 confirmed survivors from the city: Ludger Sylbaris and Léon Compère-Léandre. May 20 eruption killed 2,000 rescuers. August 30 destroyed Morne Rouge (800 dead) and other settlements. Total 1902-1905 casualties approximately 31,000.

Complete destruction of infrastructure including 20 vessels in harbor (Gueugneau et al.; Fisher and Heiken; Lacroix; Perret).

#### Depopulation

Death toll estimated at 30,000 (Chrétien and Brousse). May 8 eruption killed approximately 29,000 in Saint-Pierre within minutes. Only 2 confirmed survivors from the city: Ludger Sylbaris and Léon Compère-Léandre. May 20 eruption killed 2,000 rescuers. August 30 destroyed Morne Rouge (800 dead) and other settlements. Total 1902-1905 casualties approximately 31,000. Complete destruction of infrastructure including 20 vessels in harbor (Gueugneau et al.; Fisher and Heiken; Lacroix; Perret).

#### Forced Relocation

Death toll estimated at 30,000 (Chrétien and Brousse). May 8 eruption killed approximately 29,000 in Saint-Pierre within minutes. Only 2 confirmed survivors from the city: Ludger Sylbaris and Léon Compère-Léandre. May 20 eruption killed 2,000 rescuers. August 30 destroyed Morne Rouge (800 dead) and other settlements. Total 1902-1905 casualties approximately 31,000. Complete destruction of infrastructure including 20 vessels in harbor (Gueugneau et al.; Fisher and Heiken; Lacroix; Perret).

#### Recovery

Death toll estimated at 30,000 (Chrétien and Brousse). May 8 eruption killed approximately 29,000 in Saint-Pierre within minutes. Only 2 confirmed survivors from the city: Ludger Sylbaris and Léon Compère-Léandre. May 20 eruption killed 2,000 rescuers. August 30 destroyed Morne Rouge (800 dead) and other settlements. Total 1902-1905 casualties approximately 31,000. Complete destruction of infrastructure including 20 vessels in harbor (Gueugneau et al.; Fisher and Heiken; Lacroix; Perret).

#### Repopulation

Death toll estimated at 30,000 (Chrétien and Brousse). May 8 eruption killed approximately 29,000 in Saint-Pierre within minutes. Only 2 confirmed survivors from the city: Ludger Sylbaris and Léon Compère-Léandre. May 20 eruption killed 2,000 rescuers. August 30 destroyed Morne Rouge (800 dead) and other settlements. Total 1902-1905 casualties approximately 31,000. Complete destruction of infrastructure including 20 vessels in harbor (Gueugneau et al.; Fisher and Heiken; Lacroix; Perret).

## Volcano

LITERARY EVENT

Time	1902
Location	Carribbeans (Lesser Antilles) France (Martinique, French West Indies)
Volcano Name	The Bald Mountain
Volcanic Risk Ref.	Referenced
Typology	Stratovolcano

## INDIVIDUAL REACTIONS & AFFECTS

### Attitudes

Name	The Negro (italian: Il Negro)
Gender	Male
Native Place	Martinique
Nationality	French

Reactions

Unawareness

## COLLECTIVE REACTIONS & AFFECTS

Attitudes

Name The population

Reactions Unawareness

## Volcanic eruption 1902 Mount Pelée Eruption

LITERARY EVENT

Time 1902

Location Carribbeans (Lesser Antilles) France (Martinique, French West Indies)

Volcanic Risk Ref. Referenced

Volcano/Eruption Typology Stratovolcano

Ecological Impacts Physical Landscape Changes Atmospheric Changes

Social Impacts Deaths Destruction Of Dwellings Destruction Of Public Buildings  
Depopulation

## INDIVIDUAL REACTIONS & AFFECTS

Attitudes

Name The Negro (italian: Il Negro)

Gender Male

Native Place Martinique

Nationality French

Reactions Fear Anxiety Apprehension Discomfort Terror Madness  
Acceptance

Name The Bald Mountain (italian Translation Of The Volcano's Name: La Montagna Calva)

Reactions Fatalism Awareness Acceptance Rationality

Reactions

Name The Negro

Gender Male

Native Place	Martinique
Nationality	France
Reactions	Survival Instinct    Terror    Loss Of Consciousness    Helplessness
Name	The Bald Mountain
Reactions	Fatalism

## COLLECTIVE REACTIONS & AFFECTS

### Attitudes

Name	The population
Reactions	Unawareness

### Affects/Reactions

Name	The population
Reactions	Panic    Terror    Distress    Prayer    Fear



## LINGUISTIC & STYLISTIC ANALYSIS

Keywords	Death    Cave    Death    Fate    Chain    Fire    Grave Final Judgment    Fatalism    Fragility Of Human Life
Metaphors	"l'unico verme d'un sepolcro chiuso" 'the only worm in a closed sepulcher' (line 91; my trans.)
Similes	"freddo come il ferro" 'cold as iron' (line 8; my trans.) "uguale ad un fragor d'abissi" 'same as a roar from the abyss' (line 18; my trans.) "as a sling" 'come fosse fionda' (line 41; my trans.)

Motifs, Topoi, Mythologemes	Apocalypse    Cruel Nature    Deified Nature    Death    Ruins Hubris    Nemesis    Fire    Hell    The End Of The World    Miracles Evil
Syntax	High frequency of phenomena of the spoken language, Hypotaxis, Unconventional Position

Punctuation	Multiple Exl, Ellipsis
Morphology	Preference For Verbs Adverbs, High Frequency Passive Forms, High frequency of phenomena of the spoken language
Phonetics/Prosody	Sound-related word choice (onomatopoeia, rhyme, alliteration), Relevance of language rhythm

## 1. Introduction

Giovanni Pascoli's "Il negro di Saint-Pierre" (The Nigger of Saint-Pierre), first published in the collection *Odi e inni* in 1906, represents a crucial intersection of the poet's mature concerns: cosmic evil, death's arbitrariness, and humanity's essential precariousness. The poem exemplifies what Fabrice De Poli identifies as Pascoli's "felt need...for a new religion, founded on science" aimed at promoting "the sense of brotherhood among men, united by a common and fatal destiny" (De Poli 35). This philosophical framework transforms the historical catastrophe of Mount Pelée's 1902 eruption – which killed approximately 29,000 people in few minutes – into a meditation on the paradox of survival (namely, the paradox that surviving a catastrophe can be void of any moral significance, and not having any meaning at all), and on divine indifference to the humans' fates.

*Odi e inni* belongs to Pascoli's systematic recreation of classical genres, specifically occupying "la casella della terza maniera, quella del canto delle 'imprese attuali epicizzate attraverso riferimenti mitologici'" (the slot of the third manner, that of singing «current enterprises made epic through mythological references», Barberi Squarotti 285-286, my trans.). The poem thus participates in what he identifies as the collection's ""comune intento gnomico o pedagogico" ('common gnomic or pedagogical intent') with its "destinazione, per l'appunto collettiva e civile" ('destination, precisely collective and civic', Barberi Squarotti, 286, my trans.). This pedagogical intent transforms the historical disaster into a universal exemplum about human vulnerability.

Within *Odi e inni*, "Il negro di Saint-Pierre" forms part of what Latini identifies as a significant diptych with "Nel carcere di Ginevra" ("In the Geneva Prison"), both poems exploring the theme of the condemned prisoner confronting mortality (Latini 290). This pairing exemplifies what Ebani describes as Pascoli's "dialectical progression between texts" where contrastive poems generate meaning through their juxtaposition (290). This dialectical structure reflects "the eternal contradiction peculiar to Pascoli's *forma mentis*" already evident in *Myricae* and *Canti di Castelvecchio* (290).

The poem is composed by 120 hendecasyllables, divided in six sections, each of which features a rhyme scheme of interlocking tercets closed by a single line (ABA BCB ... XYX Y), which is an explicit hint to Dante's *Commedia*, and a common form for narrative poems

## 2. Narrative Structure

The poem's six-section structure alternates between past narration and present dialogue, creating an effect of a posthumous conversation. The prisoner's account begins in medias res – "Io stavo qui nella mia tomba, vivo" 'I was here in my tomb, alive' (line 1) – establishing the paradox of living entombment that governs the entire composition.

The temporal oscillation between imperfect tenses recounting pre-eruption imprisonment and the dramatic present of the volcano's speech creates a suspended temporality where death and life, past and present, merge indistinguishably.

The exceptional use of the personal first-person pronoun "io" (I) throughout the poem makes this poem very distant from the rest of contemporary Pascoli's corpus. As Bocchi demonstrates through exhaustive analysis, while Pascoli typically employs "io" only before imperfects in -a, here it appears consistently with both forms: "Io stavo" 'I was' (line 1; my trans.), "io sbalzavo" 'I would start up' (line 11; my trans.), "Io, sì, vivevo" 'I, yes, I lived' (line 89; my trans.). This "absolute extension of

the pronoun, absolutely exceptional in all of Pascoli's poetry" serves the poem's "narrative character" and emphasizes "the continuous oppositions of the prisoner now with the man he has stabbed, now with the Bald Mountain" (Bocchi 84). Bocchi further notes that "there are excellent reasons to assign to the *Negro di Saint-Pierre* a sort of particular narrative status, which also involves the use of the first-person singular pronoun" (84).

### 3. The Personified Volcano as Metaphysical Agent

The Mountain's self-proclamation – "Io sono, negro, la Montagna Calva, / io sono il caso, io sono il dio più forte" 'I am, negro, the Bald Mountain, / I am chance, I am the strongest god' (lines 46-47; my trans.) – establishes the volcano as simultaneously natural phenomenon and metaphysical principle. This personification transcends mere rhetorical device to embody cosmic indifference. The volcano's declaration "che gli altri uccide, ma che te, ti salva" 'that kills the others, but you, saves you' (line 47, my trans.) reveals that salvation is as arbitrary as destruction, undermining any theodicy that would assign moral meaning to survival.

The systematic cataloguing of annihilation – "uccisi il giustizier sul palco", 'I killed the executioner on the scaffold' (line 49, my trans.), "uccisi il carcerier dietro le porte" 'I killed the jailer behind the doors' (line 50, my trans.), "uccisi tutti" 'I killed everyone', (line 58, my trans.) – emphasizes what Latini describes as the complete obliteration of social hierarchy. The repetition of "uccisi" creates an almost liturgical cadence of destruction that encompasses all levels of society. Yet the mountain's indifference extends beyond destruction: "Io do la morte, non ridò la vita" 'I give death, I don't give back life' (line 86, my trans.), refusing even the consolation of reuniting the prisoner with his victim. At the same time there is something ironic in the volcano killing those who had to kill the protagonist, since their killing is a law-ordered one, while the protagonist's killing is a felony. But the mountain does not care for human justice, it seems, nor for justice at all.

The prisoner's survival inverts conventional notions of fortune. The metaphor with which he defines himself – "l'unico verme d'un sepolcro chiuso" 'the only worm in a closed sepulcher' (line 91, my trans.) – captures the grotesque nature of his preservation amid universal death. The weight of dual guilt – "O peso / di due morti, non una, entro il pensiero!" 'O weight / of two deaths, not one, within thought!' (lines 93-94, my trans.) – reveals survival not as deliverance but as intensified torment. Historical accounts confirm only two survivors from *Saint-Pierre*: Ludger Sylbaris (like Pascoli's protagonist, a prisoner) and Léon Compère-Léandre (Fisher and Heiken 350). Pascoli transforms this historical anomaly into philosophical paradox. The survival is thus an existential burden.

The survivor's condition embodies what Barberi Squarotti identifies as typical of Pascoli's civil poetry: the confrontation with "the difficult and delicate themes of social justice" where individual fate becomes emblematic of universal condition (288). The negro's survival is neither redemption nor punishment but pure contingency, reflecting the collection's broader meditation on what Latini calls the attempt "to reconcile, or at least to give voice to opposing thoughts" (287).

### 4. Language

The poem's linguistic texture reinforces its themes through phonetic and syntactic choices. The alliterative sequence "flutti / di fango, fiati di veleno, fiumi / di fuoco" 'waves / of mud, breaths of poison, rivers / of fire' (lines 60-62, my trans.), reinforced by the use of many bisyllabes (flutti, fango, fiati, fiumi, fuoco) and by the triplication of the syntactic module substantive+specificative complement, creates an onomatopoetic effect mimicking pyroclastic flow, and a sequence of eruptions followed by pauses, and then by other eruptions. The predominance of verbs over adjectives, the paratactic structure reinforced by the multiplication of similar modules (as in the former example), and multiple exclamation marks generate urgency, while the ellipses and hyphens, and enjambments, fragment discourse, mirroring the eruption's disruption of continuity.

The syntactic disruption reflects what Barberi Squarotti identifies as a characteristic of *Odi e inni*: "a collection posed, 'in position' like an equestrian statue" (284-285) that nonetheless reveals itself, as Pascoli himself said, "disarmed, disheveled, and resigned to nothingness and death" (quoted in

Barberi Squarotti 285). The poem's formal tension between classical ode structure and modernist fragmentation embodies this contradiction.

## 5. Philosophical and Religious Implications

"Il negro di Saint-Pierre" ultimately presents catastrophe as revealing existence's fundamental arbitrariness. Unlike theodicies that rationalize suffering, Pascoli's volcano admits no moral logic: it represents "il caso" ("chance") incarnate. The poem's conclusion – "O negro, soffia sopra la mia lava!" 'O negro, blow upon my lava!' (line 120, my trans.) – mockingly invites human participation in cosmic destruction, underlining humanity's powerlessness before indifferent natural forces.

This vision aligns with what Nava identifies as Pascoli's broader project where "Christianity itself is reduced, by virtue of a syncretistic comparativism, to a mystery cult of death and resurrection" (Barberi Squarotti 282). The volcano's divine claims – "io sono il dio più forte" 'I am the strongest god' (line 46, my trans.) – present a deity stripped of Christian consolation, offering neither redemption nor resurrection. This reflects Pascoli's attempt to create "a poetry aimed in effect at current events" through classical forms (Barberi Squarotti 286), transforming contemporary disaster into timeless meditation on human fragility.

The poem thus participates in what Latini identifies as the collection's oscillation "between a Pascoli already 'modern' or anyway precursor of the Twentieth century and a superfluous Pascoli, who rehashes the detritus of the Nineteenth century" (283). Yet here the tension proves productive, generating a text that transforms historical catastrophe into enduring philosophical inquiry about survival, guilt, and cosmic indifference.

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