

KRAKATOA LIGHTHOUSE

Allan Baillie

Analysis by Biancamaria Rizzardi

Historical Novel

Allan Baillie’s *Krakatoa Lighthouse* (2009) is a historical novel set in West Java during the 1883 Krakatoa eruption. Through the eyes of Kerta, a Javanese boy, the novel portrays the social impact of the disaster on settler and Indigenous communities. The eruption and subsequent tsunami expose human vulnerability and colonial inequalities: while Dutch authorities downplay volcanic risk, indigenous voices are dismissed. In this context, survival is both human struggle and cultural resistance.

Year of Publication	2009
Publication Place	Australia
Editor	Penguin Books
Entity	1883 eruption of Krakatoa

GEOLOGICAL ANALYSIS

Volcanic eruption 1883 eruption of Krakatoa

REAL EVENT

Time	August 26-27, 1883
Location	Ring of Fire, Sunda Volcanic Arc Indonesia
Coordinates	-6.102791, 105.422217
Impacted Areas	The Krakatoa Archipelago, The Province of Lampung (southern Sumatra), western Java
Base/Complex	The volcanic island of Krakatau

Typology

Explosive

"great clouds of smoke and ash" (Winchester 213)

Explosive

"falling rock" (Winchester 229); "flying lava bombs" (379); "Some of the lava bombs had been huge, some as large as a motorbus" (387)

Explosive

"hails of pumice" (Winchester 215); "enormous chunks of pumice began to rain down from the sky" (217); "Pieces of pumice hurtled down from the sky, burning fiercely like jagged meteorites" (229); "the intermittent hails of pumice stones" (241)

Volcano/Eruption Typology

Terrestrial

Caldera

"Collapse of the ancestral Krakatau edifice, perhaps in 416 AD, formed a 7-km-wide caldera. Remnants of this ancestral volcano are preserved in Verlaten and Lang Islands; subsequently Rakata, Danan and Perbuwatan volcanoes were formed, coalescing to create the pre-1883 Krakatau Island" (NOAA); "Caldera collapse during the catastrophic 1883 eruption destroyed Danan and Perbuwatan cones and left only a remnant of Rakata. The post-collapse cone of Anak Krakatau (Child of Krakatau) was constructed within the 1883 caldera at a point between the former Danan and Perbuwatan cones" (Smithsonian Institution; PVMBG)

Ecological Impacts

Atmospheric Changes

"Within moments all Anjer was enveloped in dust and cloud and became strangely dark" (Winchester 214); "the sky was completely darkened in all of southern Sumatra" (234)

Earthquake

"the rumbling of an earthquake" (Winchester 212); "ominous tremors" (226)

Tsunami

"enormous and ever-growing waves in the same Sumatran bay" (Winchester 219-220); "communities that were already huddling, frightened, along the low coastline of the Strait began to experience ever greater waves, ever more dangerous seas" (226); "the giant tsunamis generated by the eruption" (231); "the sea suddenly rose, presumably owing to the subsidence of part of Krakatau and other islands or to a submarine upheaval, and a wave of considerable height advanced with great rapidity on the shores of western Java and southern Sumatra, causing greater or less damage according to its distance from the centre of disturbance" (237)

Physical Landscape Changes

"part of Krakatau island, the island of Poeloe Temposa and other small islands in Sunda Straits have disappeared, and [...] a reef has been formed between Krakatau and Sibesie islands [...] Dwars-in-den-weg/Thwart-the-Way, an island at the northern entrance to the Straits, is reported split into five pieces, while numerous small islands are said to have been raised which had no existence previously (Winchester 237); "The west coast of Java from Merak to Tjeringin [has] been laid waste" (238); "The island of Krakatoa, meanwhile, had in essence disappeared. Six cubic miles of rock had been blasted out of existence, had been turned into pumice and ash and uncountable billions of particles of dust" (239)

Changes In The Volcano's Shape

"Krakatoa exploded August 27, 1883 obliterating 5 square miles of land and leaving a crater 3.5 miles across and 200-300 meters deep" (Mader 174)

Social Impacts

Destruction Of Goods/Commodities

"a schooner and twenty-five or thirty prahus were being carried up and down between the drawbridge and the ordinary bridge as the water rose and fell, and nothing remained unbroken, including the telegraph wires" (Winchester 225); "smashed boats" (226)

Destruction Of Dwellings

"ruined houses" (Winchester 226); "the entire town of Ketimbang [...] had been destroyed, totally" (229-230); "The Sumatran town of Ketimbang was then destroyed at 6.15 a.m., and Anjer, her

Javan sister-port across the Strait – according to the few who survived to tell the tale – was inundated and wrecked very shortly thereafter" (233-234)

Destruction Of Public Buildings

"In an instant Beyerinck's office suddenly came crashing down, along with a clutch of outbuildings" (229)

Destruction Of Facilities

"The lighthouse at Fourth Point, just to the south of Anjer, is hit by a vast wave and destroyed" (Winchester 234); "Anjer, the port [...] no longer exists" (238)

Deaths

"the whole of the southeastern coast of Sumatra must have suffered severely from the effects of the sudden influx of the sea, and thousands of natives inhabiting the villages on the coast must have almost certainly perished" (Winchester 238); "Many Europeans, including numerous officials, and many thousands of natives have been drowned" (238)

Resource Depletion

"owing to the covering of ashes which spreads over the whole country, the cattle are deprived of their ordinary nourishment" (Winchester 238)

Poverty

"It is to be feared that the natives will be greatly impoverished by the damage done to fruit and palm trees which form a source of wealth, while coffee and tea gardens and standing crops of all descriptions must have suffered severely" (Winchester 238)

Injuries

"In the aftermath of Krakatoa's eruption, 165 villages were devastated, 36,417 people died, and uncountable thousands were injured" (Winchester 242)

Volcanic eruption 1883 eruption of Krakatoa

LITERARY EVENT

Time	1883
Location	Ring of Fire, Sunda Volcanic Arc Indonesia
Impacted Areas	Anjer; The Krakatoa Archipelago, The Province of Lampung (southern Sumatra), western Java
Emphasis Phase	Disaster (phenomenal and social dynamics)
Base/Complex	The volcanic island of Krakatau
Volcanic Risk Ref.	Referenced
Typology	<div>Gases</div> <div>Ash Rainfall</div> <div>Volcanic Bombs</div> <div>Lapilli</div> <div>Emission Of Pumice Stones</div>
Volcano/Eruption Typology	<div>Terrestrial</div>
Anthropization Level	<div>Towns</div> <div>Villages</div> <div>Facilities</div> <div>Public Buildings</div> <div>Settlements</div> <div>Heritage Sites</div> <div>Sea Coast</div>
Ecological Impacts	<div>Earthquake</div> <div>Tsunami</div> <div>Changes In The Volcano's Shape</div>

	Physical Landscape Changes	Destruction Of Plants	Atmospheric Changes
Social Impacts	Deaths	Injuries	Destruction Of Goods/Commodities
	Destruction Of Dwellings	Destruction Of Facilities	
	Destruction Of Public Buildings	Destruction Of Cultural Heritage (Materials And Sites)	
	Social Disruption	Trauma	Recovery

INDIVIDUAL REACTIONS & AFFECTS

Attitudes

Name	Kerta
Age	Adolescent
Gender	Male
Native Place	West Java
Nationality	Indonesian
Reactions	<div>Fear</div> <div>Awareness</div> <div>Awe</div> <div>Caution</div> <div>Terror</div>

Name	Kerta's Father Pa'				
Age	Adult				
Gender	Male				
Native Place	West Java				
Nationality	Indonesian				
Reactions	Awareness	Fear	Caution	Acceptance	Adaptation
	Rationality				

Name	Harbourmaster Van Leewen			
Age	Adult			
Gender	Male			
Native Place	The Netherlands			
Nationality	Dutch			
Reactions	Disregard	Awareness	Scepticism	Underestimation

Name	Master Telegrapher Schruit			
Age	Adult			
Gender	Male			
Native Place	The Netherlands			
Nationality	Dutch			
Reactions	Calm	Underestimation	Awareness	Unease

Name	Professor Macdougall
Age	Adult
Gender	Male
Native Place	Scotland
Nationality	Scottish
Reactions	<div>Awareness</div> <div>Rationality</div> <div>Caution</div> <div>Underestimation</div>

Name	Mr. Schuurman
Age	Adult
Gender	Male
Native Place	The Netherlands
Nationality	Dutch
Reactions	<div>Disregard</div> <div>Underestimation</div> <div>Awareness</div>

Reactions

Name	Kerta
Age	Adolescent
Gender	Male
Native Place	West Java
Nationality	Indonesian
Reactions	<div>Escape</div> <div>Fight For Survival</div> <div>Survival Instinct</div>

Name	Kerta's Father Pa'
Age	Adult
Gender	Male
Native Place	West Java
Nationality	Indonesia
Reactions	<div>Escape</div> <div>Intervention</div> <div>Solidarity</div> <div>Fight For Survival</div> <div>Survival Instinct</div> <div>Pragmatism</div> <div>Order</div> <div>Cooperation</div> <div>Heroism</div> <div>Rationality</div>

Name	Harbourmaster Van Leewen
Age	Adult
Gender	Male
Native Place	The Netherlands
Nationality	Dutch
Reactions	<div>Concealment Of Information</div> <div>Distrust</div> <div>Underestimation</div> <div>Scepticism</div>

Name	Master Telegrapher Schruit
------	----------------------------

Age	Adult
Gender	Male
Native Place	The Netherlands
Nationality	Indonesian
Reactions	<div>Escape</div> <div>Fight For Survival</div> <div>Survival Instinct</div> <div>Sharing Of Information</div> <div>Pragmatism</div> <div>Intervention</div> <div>Terror</div> <div>Underestimation</div>

Name	Professor Macdougall
Age	Adult
Gender	Male
Native Place	Scotland
Nationality	Scottish
Reactions	<div>Escape</div> <div>Underestimation</div> <div>Rationality</div>

Name	Mr. Schuurman
Age	Adult
Gender	Male
Native Place	The Netherlands
Nationality	Dutch
Reactions	<div>Underestimation</div> <div>Escape</div> <div>Concealment Of Information</div>

COLLECTIVE REACTIONS & AFFECTS

Attitudes

Name	White people
Reactions	<div>Awareness</div> <div>Underestimation</div> <div>Acceptance</div> <div>Adaptation</div> <div>Disregard</div> <div>Denial</div>

Name	Indigenous people
Reactions	<div>Awareness</div> <div>Acceptance</div> <div>Adaptation</div> <div>Awe</div> <div>Caution</div>

Name	Adventurers
Reactions	<div>Unawareness</div> <div>Underestimation</div> <div>Disregard</div>

Name	Colonists
------	-----------

Reactions	<div>Awareness</div> <div>Underestimation</div> <div>Acceptance</div> <div>Adaptation</div> <div>Disregard</div> <div>Denial</div>
Affects/Reactions	
Name	White people
Reactions	<div>Underestimation</div> <div>Escape</div> <div>Concealment Of Information</div>
Name	Indigenous people
Reactions	<div>Escape</div> <div>Solidarity</div> <div>Fight For Survival</div> <div>Survival Instinct</div> <div>Cooperation</div>
Name	Settlers
Reactions	<div>Escape</div>
Name	Colonists
Reactions	<div>Escape</div> <div>Underestimation</div> <div>Concealment Of Information</div>
LINGUISTIC & STYLISTIC ANALYSIS	
Keywords	<div>Allan Baillie</div> <div>1883 Krakatoa Eruption</div> <div>Colonialism</div> <div>Javanese Cosmology</div> <div>Colonial Hubris</div> <div>Assimilation</div> <div>Indigenous Resilience</div>
Metaphors	"Rakata was a dead crab on a beach" (Baillie 65) "the portal of Hell" (Baillie 124)
Similes	"Perboewatan cracked like thunder" (Baillie 69) "It sounded like soldiers [...] fighting to capture the crater" (Baillie 70)
Motifs, Topoi, Mythologemes	<div>Locus Horridus</div> <div>Hell</div> <div>Deified Nature</div> <div>Thunder</div> <div>War</div> <div>Colonisers</div> <div>Colonised People</div> <div>Hubris</div> <div>The End Of The World</div> <div>Mythical Creatures</div>
Syntax	Simple Sentences
Punctuation	No Peculiarities
Morphology	Preference For Nouns Adjectives

Allan Baillie's *Krakatoa Lighthouse* (2009) is a historical novel set in Indonesia between May 19 and August 29, 1883, with the devastating eruption of Krakatoa on August 27 as its narrative climax. The setting includes Anjer, a coastal town in the Indonesian province of West Java, Anjer's lighthouse, and the island Krakatoa, located 30 miles east from Anjer's coast. At the time, Indonesia was part of the Netherlands East Indies as the Dutch had gradually established control of the Sunda Strait from the late 17th century. The novel's protagonist is Kerta, a young Indonesian boy living in a *kampong* (small village) near Anjer. Baillie tells the story of the Krakatoa eruption through a third-person narrative voice and an internal focalisation on Kerta. Haunted by the local legend of *Orang Aljeh*, the dark spirit said to dwell within Krakatoa, and by *Antoe Laoet*, the spirit of the sea, Kerta is deeply fearful of the volcano and superstitious about approaching it. Alongside his family's members, his friend Bas, his Dutch friend Ian, Anjer's Master Telegrapher Schruit and other people living in the town's surroundings, he navigates both personal and social struggles due to the tension between the Dutch settlers and the Indigenous marginalised communities. Such tensions rise as volcanic tremors and strange natural events foreshadow the eruption. When Krakatoa finally explodes, all the characters are forced into a desperate fight for survival.

Krakatoa is located in the so-called Ring of Fire, a vast horseshoe-shaped network of volcanoes that encircles the Pacific Ocean, stretching over 25,000 miles. Regarding the origin of the Krakatoa archipelago, Simon Winchester explains that its three main islands Panjang/Rakata Kecil (Lang), Sertung (Verlaten), and Rakata "had been originated from consecutive eruptions started 60,000 years ago, which split the Ancient Krakatoa – a very large mountain – blowing almost all to smithereens" (Winchester 150). According to most modern history books and scientific sources, prior to 1883, three early eruptions occurred in the anno Domini years 416, 535, and 1680, this latter being a moderate eruption and the only one confirmed by official sources (155). During the 416 A.D. eruption, "the caldera of the volcano collapsed. The remnants formed a new caldera around 7 km (4 miles) in diameter, with the peak's remnants becoming the three islands of Verlaten, Lang, and Krakatau (formerly known as Krakatoa)" (NASA Earth Observatory).

In 1883, therefore, Krakatoa consisted of three craters: Perboewatan, the northernmost and most active; Danan in the middle; and the largest, Rakata, which formed the southern end of the island. On May 20, 1883, volcanic activity resumed from Perboewatan, sending ash-filled clouds as high as 6,8 miles into the sky. The eruptions were so loud that explosions were heard in Batavia (now Jakarta). However, the activity subsided by the end of the month. It picked up again on June 19 and escalated significantly by August 26. On that day, at 1:06 p.m., a series of increasingly powerful eruptions began. The first roar of such explosions was heard by the telegraph-master working in the city of Anjer, Mr Schruit, who "saw, instantly, the unforgettable sight of a tremendous eruption" (Winchester 270). In his journal, Captain Sampson of the British vessel *Norham Castle* wrote about an incessant rain of pumice stones, while Captain Watson of the *Charles Bal* reported a dark rain of rocks. At 2:45 p.m. Captain Lindeman, master of the *Loudon*, was able to avoid "showers of ash and rocks cascading down from the plumes of smoke" (273). By mid-afternoon the ash column had risen to a height of seventeen miles. By 5:00 p.m. enormous chunks of pumice began to rain down from the sky. Reports from ships in the Sunda Strait speak continually of smashed boats and inundations of low-lying land.

On August 27, between 5:30 a.m. and 6:15 a.m. the cities of Ketimbang and Anjer were destroyed by another great explosion and a resulting succession of tidal waves. A second one occurred at 6:44 a.m. The most intense eruption occurred at 10:02 a.m., producing colossal explosions that were audible as far away as Australia. It had an estimated Volcanic Explosivity Index (VEI) of 6, and is one of the deadliest and most destructive volcanic events in recorded history. The cloud of gas and white-hot pumice is believed to have risen to the height of twenty-four miles in the air. Part of Krakatau Island, the island of Poeloe Temposa and other small islands in the Sunda Straits disappeared due to the giant waves caused by either the subsidence phenomenon or submarine upheaval. A series of giant waves advanced on the shores of western Java and southern Sumatra, causing devastation and damage in several areas.

As Winchester observes,

The destruction caused by the waves on shore both to life and property, although known from reports already to hand to be very widespread, can hardly yet be estimated with any degree of certainty, as

owing to the action of the sea and the heavy rain of ashes, telegraph and road communication has been either entirely interrupted or is much delayed. (298)

The intensity of the explosions gradually decreased throughout the rest of the day, and by the morning of August 28, the volcano had become quiet. Minor eruptions persisted over the following months, continuing until February 1884.

The eruption brought about huge changes in the surrounding physical landscape. Most of Krakatoa Island vanished, leaving only the southern third of the island intact. A large section of the Rakata volcanic cone was blown away, exposing a steep cliff about 250 meters high and “a crater 3.5 miles across and 200-300 meters deep” (Mader 174). In the island’s northern region, all that remained was a small rocky outcrop called Bootsmanrots (“Bosun’s Rock”), which was a surviving piece of Danan. Polish Hat, a small rocky islet between Krakatoa Island and Lang Island, completely disappeared. Furthermore, the eruption discharged an enormous volume of material, significantly reshaping the seafloor around the volcano. Thick layers of ignimbrite filled in the deep basin surrounding the area: its depth, which was about 100 meters before the eruption, increased to between 200 and 300 meters afterward. The landmasses of Verlaten and Lang islands grew in size, as did the western edge of what remained of Rakata.

Plants and animals on the islands were severely affected by the eruption, which buried everything under a thick layer of ash. Unfortunately, very little is known about the previous flora and fauna. Edmond Cotteau visited the islands of Sebuko and Sebesi on May 27, 1884 and found that the only sign of animal life was a spider. However, in 1889, Emil Salenska found there a rich fauna of insects, spiders and giant lizards (Dammerman 9). By 1897, the bare ash slopes of Rakata, Sertung, and Panjang “gave way to open coastal *pes-caprae* (morning glory) formations and pioneer grass communities at high altitudes. Coastal *Barringtonia* and *Casuarina* forests were established by 1906 but *pes-caprae* persisted on the beaches” (Rawlinson et al. 21–22).

Regarding the social impact of the disaster,

in the aftermath of Krakatoa’s eruption, 165 villages were devastated, 36,417 people died, and uncountable thousands were injured – and almost all of them, villages and inhabitants, were victims not of the eruption directly but of the immense sea-waves that were propelled outwards from the volcano by that last night of detonations. (302)

The official number of dead, calculated by the Dutch East India Company, was 36,417 (90 percent of whom were killed directly by the tsunamis). However, more accurate estimates, including native populations and the aftermath, raise the death toll to over 100,000.

In *Krakatoa Lighthouse*, Baillie builds on Winchester’s study to portray the geological history of Krakatoa and offer a realistic representation of the 1883 eruption and its ecological and social impact. Regarding past eruptions, Winchester mentions an anonymous sea-captain aboard the cutter *Aardenburgh* and a certain Major Vogel aboard the ship *Nieuw-Middelburgh* as the only witnesses of a “rising smoke column” (Winchester 50) that signalled volcanic activity on the island in 1680. In the novel, coherently with Winchester’s account, Kerta’s father maintains that “Orang Aljeh hadn’t stirred for two hundred years. And even then it was nothing at all. A little bit of black smoke reported by a couple of Dutch captains” (Baillie 39). He adds that also “people in the kampong had forgotten about it” (39), underlining how temporal distance and “infrequent experience of volcanic hazard consequences [may influence] risk perception and preparedness” (Paton et al. 180). In this passage, Baillie seems to refer to the “normalisation bias”, a psychological and ideological barrier to risk perception that makes people “infer from an ability to cope with (objectively) minor eruption consequences a capability to deal with any future occurrence” (180).

On May 20, Kerta gets on the steam-launch Goliath with Professor MacDougal – a Scottish adventurer and geologist – to visit Krakatoa Island. On that occasion, he observes that “Krakatoa was now a mountain. Dark green jungle clawed up severe slopes towards the high peak. There the small crater was tickling a golden cloud, as if the old volcano was remembering its past” (Baillie 51). The verb “clawed up” reflects how Kerta perceives the volcanic mountain as a living being; coherently with this view of the local environment as *natura naturans*, the shift from the hypernym “mountain”

to the hyponym “volcano” underscores how Krakatoa may be only apparently dormant. Furthermore, the personification of the old volcano as an ‘old creature’ reflecting on its past foreshadows its coming unrest, and resonates with MacDougal’s later talk of ancient cataclysm preserved in stone. In the novel, the volcano’s rocks and stones are presented as “storied matter”, namely “a corporeal palimpsest in which stories are inscribed” (Iovino 451). Observing some pumice stones found on Krakatoa, MacDougal concludes that they must be “pumice from that eruption two hundred years ago” (62), showing how “matter produces [...] geological narratives” (Oppermann 32).

Regarding risk perception, Kerta is more frightened by Orang Aljeh (the spirit of the volcano) rather than Antoe Laoet (the spirit of the sea). His words, “the Ghost of Krakatoa is different. I don’t know what it is and I don’t want to know. I don’t want to wake it” (57), reflects his unconscious fear of a (super)natural force he has never experienced. By contrast, “Pa watched the Ghost of the Sea like a monkey watches a tree snake, but he didn’t worry about the Ghost of Krakatoa, Orang Aljeh” (57). The reason for his father’s fear of the sea is explained in the chapter titled “Monday, May 21”: when he and other Javanese men were fishing offshore the village of Lebak, “[a] swell of one metre – no more – passed under [their] proa and was gone, as if Antoe Laoet had belched. [They] didn’t think about it” (84); only an old fisherman had warned them since “with his thin blood he had felt Antoe Laoet moving” (85). When they came back to the village, they discovered that everything was gone due to a huge wave. Kerta’s father refers to that tragic event as “long time ago”, but soon straightens himself by stating “No, it’s yesterday” (85), and thus juxtaposing the different scales of human time and geological time. Then, he adds: “I’m like the old fishermen – I feel Antoe Laoet and Orang Aljeh. The Dutch can stroll around Anjer like sultans, but I can feel the mountain, and it’s moving”. In this excerpt, the narrator highlights how direct experience – later turned into body-memory – plus Indigenous knowledge – which functions as an effective risk-reading system – have made Kerta’s father alert to sea risk.

Heading to Krakatoa, Kerta notes that “Rakata, Danan and Perboewatan were like a great dragon sleeping in the still water” (57). This simile turns rocks into the emerging parts of a monstrous living body living beneath the sea, with the three aligned cones (Rakata, Danan, Perboewatan) likened to the segmented spine of such fantastic creature. This image pertains to an animist lexicon that is coherent with Indonesian cosmology. In Indonesian and Melanesian legends, for example, the Hindu-Buddhist *nāgas* are mentioned as a mighty serpents/dragons living in the sea that sometimes can “cause floods” (Mackenzie 313).

While sailing the area, Kerta recalls his people’s accounts about the geological reality of the archipelago. When he approaches the islands, he sees the “Lang Island had slid from away from the remainder of Krakatoa, revealing its other peaks, Danan, 455 metres high, and Perboewatan, only 120 metres high”. Later, he explains to MacDougal that “Everyone in the kampongs knows that they were three islands with volcanoes a long time ago. Then they grew” (58). Scientific knowledge involving Krakatoa’s past and current topographical details is filtered through Kerta’s voice, creating a convergence of Indigenous episteme and geological accuracy. The following passage dramatizes the juxtaposition of colonisers’ self-confidence – pervaded with scientific arrogance and cultural prejudices – and Indigenous knowledge:

[MacDougal] “I am a geologist – dabbling in volcanoes – I am supposed to know those things, but people in kampongs ... How do they know that?”

[Kerta] ‘My father told me and his grandpa told him ...’

[MacDougal] ‘And his grandpa told him, and his grandpa, and his grandpa ... Yes, of course.’ (58)

By asserting “I am a geologist... I am supposed to know,” MacDougal frames Western science as the sole arbiter of truth and positions “people in kampongs” as epistemically inferior. His incredulous “How do they know that?” presumes that Indigenous people should not possess valid geological understanding, and his mocking of the oral transmission of geological notions and facts (“and his grandpa... and his grandpa”) reduces a wealth of knowledge to mere hearsay. However, when MacDougal positions his camera to take a picture of the archipelago and looks through the glass, he suddenly recalls what he read in an old Javanese book titled *The Book of Ancient Kings* “in about 500 AD ‘the mountain burst into pieces with a tremendous roar and sank into the deepest part of the Earth.

And there was flooding. Java and Sumatra were divided. The ash from that eruption would have darkened the entire world” (66). Before the remnants of the old Krakatoa, he acknowledges the limits of his understanding and repositions himself by maintaining “I will listen to every old story carefully now” (66).

On the island, Kerta hears the shrieks of white parrots, and is afraid that sound comes from Orang Aljeh: “for one terrible moment he had thought that Krakatoa was screaming in anger – at him” (63). When he experiences a mild tremor, he imagines that “Orang Aljeh was stretching [as he] was on his island” (64). Once he reaches Krakatoa’s highest peak, he concludes that “Rakata was a dead crab on a beach” (65) as there is no sign of steam at the bottom of the crater. By using this metaphor, the author refers to the Sanskrit etymology of the toponym *Rakata*, which in old Javanese means “crab”, to present the crater as a ‘dead’ creature belonging to the underwater world. Once again, figurative language is used to suggest how Krakatoa, like other marine creatures, is a living being originated from the sea, and only deceptively ‘dead’. Indeed, when Kerta glimpses “a plume of white steam rising from [Perboewatan]” and hears “A cannon blast [that] echoed around the island”, he realises that “Orang Aljeh had woken” (68). Suddenly, the ground cracks and black stones are ejected from the trench. The sound of these phenomena is compared to “soldiers [...] fighting to capture the crater” (70). These phrasing and similes militarise the landscape, depicting the island as a besieged fort, and suggesting an analogy between the awakening of Perboewatan and the uprising of the Javanese people against their European invaders. These literary devices serve to elevate the volcano from a natural hazard to a symbolic force of reckoning, reflecting both ecological fury and political subtext.

Once back on land, Kerta observes different reactions to the signs of volcanic activity on Krakatoa: while the Dutch in Anjer tend to downplay the seriousness of the situation, some Javanese people living near the kampong seem to be out of their mind, hissing incomprehensible words, throwing mud at themselves, or desperately crying. Faced with these puzzling scenes, Kerta feels astray; his reflections are representative of his cultural cringe, a condition connected to colonial rule and cultural assimilation: “The Dutch aren’t worried about Krakatoa. It’s only the Javanese who are frightened. The stupid, panicky Javanese – stupid, panicky us!” (78). In this excerpt, Kerta sees his people through the colonizer’s stereotyped gaze, discounting proximate warnings as mere ‘native hysteria’.

When an exploration vessel arrives in Anjer carrying Dutch adventurers that aim to see the steam venting from Perboewatan’s crater, Professor MacDougal and Kerta join them. In his novel, Baillie dramatizes real historical facts concerning the first phase of 1883 eruption, showing how the Dutch underestimated Krakatoa’s volcanic risk in the name of profit. As Winchester observes, in the period of volcanic activity preceding the major eruption, “The Netherlands Indies Steamship Company was the first to recognize the tourist potential of the event”, (Winchester 172), filling the vessel Gouverneur-General Loudon with a load of Dutch adventurers that aimed to see the event. In *Krakatoa Lighthouse*, Baillie presents a biofictional version of both Loudon’s Captain Lindeman and the engineer A. L. Schuurman, the latter being one of the adventurers and volcano lovers whose “foolhardiness [...] knew no bounds” (174).

At the end of May, Kerta comes back to Krakatoa Island with MacDougal, Mr. Schuurman, and other Dutch explorers. Observing how they swarm over Perboewatan, he reflects on the fact that “Orang Aljeh might have been ready to explode in fury, but the Dutchmen were not interested”, and asks himself “Was it because they were invincible?” (120). “They swarm over Perboewatan” frames the Dutch as an invasive mass claiming every surface. They treat the earth as an inert mass, but the phrase “ready to explore in fury” unveils how their behaviour is irrational. Schuurman maintains that they have found “the portal of Hell” and that he wants “to put the Devil’s fire out”, embodying the arrogance and delusion of omnipotence pertaining to hubris. By contrast, Kerta is sure he has seen “the face of Orang Aljeh” (124) and “the teeth of Orang Aljeh” (126) in the crater, and feels uneasy about violating the spirit’s realm. The semantic field of Hell is juxtaposed with that of monstrosity; while white settlers see the volcanic island as a dreadful, evil place, Kerta sees it as a living being ready to devour everything. The expression “the throat of the volcano” (124) reflects Kerta’s perception of Krakatoa as an embodiment of Orang Aljeh.

On August 26, steam begins to belch from the volcano, followed by a rumble resembling a thunder. Soon, the white vapour turns into black smoke spread across the sky, and darkness falls on Anjer. Kerta notes that “The dark strait was now surging up and down, as if there was something down

below the surface. Angry swells began to rush onto the Water Wharf” (165). Through the eyes of the young Javanese boy, the narrator describes the different reactions of Anyer’s citizens and the Javanese people as the sea retreats and the ash fall intensifies: the Chinese flee en masse from the town; the Dutch merchant Joost asserts that what is occurring is “the end of the world” (166); the harbourmaster van Leewen cries out: “It is not the Day of Judgement [...] it is just a normal volcanic eruption. It happens all the time in the Dutch Indies [...] Just ignore it, as we have in the past” (167). When a sudden purple light shimmers in the sky, followed by violent cracks, the harbourmaster keeps on downplaying the event’s seriousness. Master Telegrapher Schruit too underestimates the risk of a major eruption.

On Monday 27 August, four explosions of Krakatoa result in four tsunamis that devastate Anjer; the early phase of the event is described with historical accuracy:

Out there in Sunda Strait was a grey wall that blocked the entire horizon from Krakatoa to Thwart-the-Way Island. It was moving towards the canal. A great wall of water was scudding over the sea at him. It was beginning to roar, coming faster than a clipper ship, and it was high. Higher than that schooner’s mainmast. The wall of water was twelve metres high. And there were two more behind it. (196)

Kerta survives the fatal wave by clinging to a coconut palm and later reaches the lighthouse at Fourth Point (Anjer), where his father keeps on guiding the ships toward safe water. In the description of the man’s efforts to keep the lighthouse working, the narrator builds on a dialectic of light: the volcano’s “destructive” glare contrasts with the lighthouse’s “salvific” beam, with Kerta’s father mediating between sea and shore until a wave taller than the lighthouse itself annihilates that paternal, guiding structure, and kills Kerta’s parents and his sister Dewi.

Apocalyptic imagery frames total rupture: “It was as if the world had jerked to a stop and all the oceans had whipped from their muddy beds. The Doomsday story [...] was happening” (213). However, Kerta’s challenges the hostile forces of nature by following his father’s heroic example: he ignites the lighthouse’s remains to guide the scattered boats and finally affirms “We are still here” (217). This final sentence reasserts communal agency amid ecological catastrophe and colonial neglect, reframing survival as an act of epistemic resistance as much as physical endurance.

In *Krakatoa Lighthouse*, the 1883 cataclysm is turned into a historical narrative dealing with several intertwined themes such as the impact of European colonisation on West Java, the relationship between scientific disciplines and Indigenous knowledge, risk perception, hubris, and resilience. Comparing Winchester’s account with the ending the novel, we note that the figure of the (colonial) keeper of Fourth Point is replaced by the young Indigenous hero Kerta. Through this choice, Baillie assigns agency and testimony to a vulnerable subject living at the periphery of the imperial apparatus, ‘writing back’ to the historical archive to highlight the resilience and ethics of care of the Javanese people.

Bibliography

Baillie, Allan. *Krakatoa Lighthouse*. Ebook ed. Penguin Books Ltd, 2010.

Dammerman, Karel W. *The Fauna of Krakatau, 1833-1933*. Noord-Hollandsche Uitg.-Mij, 1948.

Iovino, Serenella. “Stories from the Thick of Things: Introducing Material Ecocriticism.” *Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment*, vol. 19, no. 3, 2012, pp. 448–60.

Mackenzie, Donald A. *Myths from Melanesia and Indonesia*. Gresham Publishing Company, 1930.

Mader, Charles. “Numerical Modeling for the Krakatoa Hydrovolcanic Explosion and Tsunami.” *Science of Tsunami Hazards*, vol. 24, no. 3, 2006, pp. 174–182. ResearchGate,

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/264084050_Numerical_Modeling_for_the_Krakatoa_Hydrovolcanic_Explosion_and_Tsunami. Accessed 07 Jul. 2025.

Oppermann, Serpil. "From Ecological Postmodernism to Material Ecocriticism. Creative Materiality and Narrative Agency." *Material Ecocriticism*, edited by Serenella Iovino and Serpil Oppermann, Indiana University Press, 2014, pp. 21–36.

Paton, Douglas, et al. "Risk perception and volcanic hazard mitigation: Individual and social perspectives." *Journal of Volcanology and Geothermal Research*, vol. 172, no. 3–4, pp. 179–188. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jvolgeores.2007.12.026>. Accessed 07 Jul. 2025.

Rawlinson, et al. "The Terrestrial Vertebrate Fauna of the Krakatau Islands, Sunda Strait, 1883-1986." *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society of London*, vol. 328, no. 1245, May 24, 1990, pp. 3–28. *JSTOR*, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/55340>. Accessed 07 Jul. 2025.

Winchester, Simon. *Krakatoa: The Day the World Exploded: August 27, 1883*. HarperCollins, 2003.

Global Volcanism Program, 2025. "Krakatau" (262000). *Volcanoes of the World* (v. 5.3.0; 17 Jul 2025). Distributed by Smithsonian Institution, compiled by Venzke, E. <https://volcano.si.edu/volcano.cfm?vn=262000>. Accessed 07 Jul. 2025.

"Krakatau Volcano National Park." *NASA Earth Observatory*, NASA, <https://earthobservatory.nasa.gov/images/3844/krakatau-volcano-national-park>. Accessed 07 Jul. 2025.

"Volcano event: Krakatau 1883." *NOAA National Centers for Environmental Information (NCEI)*, National Geophysical Data Center, <https://www.ngdc.noaa.gov/hazel/view/hazards/volcano/event-more-info/2429>. Accessed 07 Jul. 2025.