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Affective ecology and the emotional archive of climate collapse in Lord Byron's *Darkness*

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines Lord Byron's apocalyptic poem "Darkness" (1816) through affective ecology, exploring how metaphors express the emotional and psychological impact of environmental collapse. Composed after Mount Tambora's eruption, which caused global climatic anomalies and "The Year Without a Summer," the poem captures the atmospheric and emotional fallout. Drawing on Glenn Albrecht, Lawrence Buell, and Sara Ahmed, this study approaches affect not as an emotion but as an ecological condition shaped by environmental instability. Through close textual analysis, the paper investigates how the poem engages five core affective-ecological concepts: biophilia, naturalist intelligence, fascination, affiliation, and emotional bonds. It argues that "Darkness" provides poetic form to solastalgia, disorientation, and ecological despair. Employing a qualitative, interdisciplinary approach combining affect theory, ecocriticism, and Romantic studies, the study contends that Byron's poem functions as a creative response to ecological trauma and an archive of emotional distress rooted in environmental crisis. Rather than reading "Darkness" solely as an apocalyptic Romantic vision, the study reinterprets it as an early literary record of emotional collapse in response to climate change. The findings highlight Byron's relevance to contemporary eco-anxiety and illustrate how Romantic poetry can be re-evaluated as a conduit for ecological and emotional witness in the Anthropocene.

Contribution/ Originality: This study contributes to the existing scholarship on Romantic studies by demonstrating how metaphors in Byron's "Darkness" express ecological trauma and emotional collapse following the Tambora eruption. It integrates affect theory and ecocriticism to interpret the poem as an early archive of climate-induced anxiety and a precursor to eco-anxiety discourse.

1. INTRODUCTION

Mount Tambora, an active volcano on Sumbawa Island, Indonesia, erupted in 1815. The eruption released nearly 150 cubic kilometers of tephra and ash, with the ash cloud diffused over approximately 1,300 kilometers (Mount Tambora Volcano Sumbawa Island Indonesia, 2009). The eruption commenced on 5 April 1815 and attained maximum intensity on 10 April, surpassing prior levels of destruction, with the sound of the explosion audible in Sumatra, approximately 2,300 kilometers away (Boers, 1995). Observers misinterpreted the eruption's violent reverberations for cannon fire, and the region, shrouded in unrelenting darkness for three consecutive days, was heavily affected. The eruption columns coalesced to produce an enormous plume that reduced the mountain to a stream of molten fire. Volcanic ash and pumice showered the area, while pyroclastic flows cascaded down the mountain, devastating adjacent habitations. As per Stothers (1984), the eruption set off tsunamis, 1 to 4 meters in height, across the Indonesian archipelago. British vessels located 3,600 kilometers west of Tambora reported vast

pumice rafts (The Asiatic Society, 1816). Minute ash particles remained in the air for months to years at elevations between 10 to 30 kilometers, distributed globally by the winds, whereas coarser material settled in one to two weeks (Stothers, 1984). Four years after the incident, in August 1819, reports of flames and rumbling aftershocks surfaced (Post, 1977). The estimates of direct and indirect fatalities caused by the Tambora eruption (1815) are widely divergent among sources, ranging from 38,000 to 100,000 (Oppenheimer, 2003; Petroeschevsky, 1949; Reid, 2015; Tanguy, Ribière, Scarth, & Tjetjep, 1998; Zollinger, 1855). As Wood (2014) recounts, "Beneath that, loggers uncovered a cache of Chinese-patterned pottery shards and burned human bone fragments. Locals soon showed up with brass pots, jewelry, and eighteenth-century Dutch coins they said also belonged to the site a blurry snapshot of the unrecovered Pompeii of the East" (Wood, 2014). In 1816, the aftermath led to a significant drop of 0.4-0.7°C in the average global temperature due to the massive emission of sulfur dioxide (SO_2) into the atmosphere (Stothers, 1984). The summer temperature in western and central Europe was 1-2°C below the 1810-1819 average (Oppenheimer, 2003). Persistent fog from 1815 to 1816 significantly impacted the intensity of sunlight (Cole-Dai et al., 2009). Unseasonal snow was reported on June 6, 1816, in Canada, Denny 'sville (Maine), and Albany (New York), while Cabot (Vermont) had 46 cm of snow on June 8 (New England Historical Society, 2020). Frosts at higher elevations, such as in New Hampshire, led to extensive agricultural loss (Skeen, 1981). The climatic disruption caused by the eruption is connected to Southeast Europe and the Eastern Mediterranean outbreaks of typhus (1816–1819), crop failure in India, a new cholera strain in Bengal, and unusually severe frost, snow, and ice in southern China (Evensen & Peterson, 2010; Oppenheimer, 2003). New England livestock losses, German famine riots, and Irish and British Isles harvest disasters caused by reduced temperatures and heavy rains forced families to make lengthened journeys in pursuit of food. (Oppenheimer, 2003). Therefore, the year 1816 was referred to as the "Year Without a Summer," "Eighteen Hundred and Froze to Death," and the "Poverty Year" (New England Historical Society, 2020).

2. IMPACT OF THE ERUPTION ON LORD BYRON

As the impact of Tambora intensified in 1816, Byron, in exile from England, accompanied P.B. Shelley and Mary Shelley on a tour across Europe. Their letters and journals express an atmosphere of unease, as they constantly experienced the suffocating weather consecutively for months, defined by the glaring lack of spring and summer. This chronic atmospheric gloom not only shaped their psychological state but also imbued their poetic compositions with a sense of existential and environmental unease. Shelley (1817), *History of a Six Weeks' Tour* (1817, 90) accounts for disrupted weather throughout their tour, noting late spring, constant cold, rain, and sporadic snow. On 17 May 1816, she reported snow in Les Rousses and worsening weather with constant rain and storms on 1 June 1816 in Geneva (Shelley, 1817). The impact of the anomalous cold on P. B. Shelley is evident in Letter IV (22 July), in which he articulates anxieties concerning the climate, prophesying that the Earth would eventually be "a mass of frost" (Shelley, 1817). His remark regarding the ceaseless advancement of glaciers and the expansion of polar ice implies an extreme fear of a possible glacial growth that will finally convert the world into frost. The allusion to Buffon's theory enhances existential fear towards nature's uncontrollable and hostile power.

In Letter 242 to Mr. Murray, dated 27 June 1816, Byron describes the weather as stressful: "I am thus far (kept by stress of weather) on my way back to Diodati (near Geneva) from a voyage in my boat around the Lake" (Moore, 1854). Similarly, in his letter 244 to Mr. Rogers of Diodati near Geneva on 29 July 1816, Lord Byron describes the weather as it actually happened due to the Tambora eruption globally during the year 1816.

> I came here by the Netherlands and the Rhine route, and Basel, Bern, Morat, and Lausanne. I have circumnavigated the lake, and go to Chamonix with the first fair weather; but really we have had lately such stupid mists, fogs, and perpetual density, that one would think Castlereagh had the Foreign Affairs of the kingdom of Heaven also on his hands. I need say nothing to you of these parts, you having traversed them already (Moore, 1854).

Byron's reference to "stupid mists, fogs, and unceasing density" highlights the feeling of climatic disorientation and powerlessness. The jibe that Castlereagh is dealing with "the Foreign Affairs of the kingdom of Heaven" portrays his helplessness in response to the unremitting and uncontrollable climatic turbulence and a deep anxiety about nature's volatility and humanity's inability to master it. This psychological backdrop helps illuminate the emotional charge in "Darkness" (1816), where affective bonds with nature are both thematically central and metaphorically destabilized. The unnerving gloom and sensory inversion brought by Tambora's global atmospheric effects, commonly called "the Year Without a Summer," profoundly influenced Byron's writing in 1816. His works from this period, including "Darkness" (1816), "Prometheus" (1816), *Manfred* (1817), and segments of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* (Canto III & IV) (1816–1818), exhibit an intensified engagement with themes of despair, ecological ruin, and existential estrangement. These writings can be seen as both literary responses to and emotional imprints of the planetary trauma, bearing witness to an internalized environmental crisis that shaped the Romantic imagination.

2.1. Affective Ecology and its Relevance in Byron's "Darkness" (1816)

Against this background of planetary disruption, Byron's "Darkness" is not simply a speculative apocalyptic vision; it is an affective response to tangible environmental trauma. The idiosyncratic weather, seasonal inversion, and sensory confusion produced by the Tambora eruption (1815) created a significant rift in humanity's relationship with the nonhuman world. In this reconfigured perceptual and affective environment, the suite of ideas that compose affective ecology plays an important role in understanding Byron's work. Affective ecology emphasizes the interplay between emotion and ecological environments, as how the nonhuman world produces affective states and how emotions and feelings impact human perception of the nonhuman world (Barbiero, 2014). In "Darkness" (1816), Byron registers a disintegration of biophilic and affiliative ties that usually connect humans with the living world (Grinde & Patil, 2009). Hence, the poem's vocabulary functions metaphorically to illustrate the dissolution of these emotional bonds. Instead of being a familiar source of nourishment, the earth becomes a nonrelational space of alienation, anxiety, and existential dread. This transformation of natural intelligibility, whereby the nonhuman world becomes unreadable and unrelatable, resonates with what affective ecologists perceive as a collapse of emotional intelligibility in the midst of ecological trauma. Byron's metaphoric universe maps a range of ecological affects like despair, anxiety, grief, and fear linked to the loss of ecological stability. The cosmos, which awed previously, has been replaced with a spectacle of destruction, a horror that eclipses wonder, and biophilic impulse gives way to biophobic recoil. The emotional climate of the poem resonates with what contemporary theorists call eco-anxiety (Ojala, 2018). It is a psychological response to the perceived rupture of ecological systems and the loss of ontological assurance and stability that accompany ecological trouble. Therefore, it is important to note that "Darkness" (1816) is not merely a Romantic meditation on the apocalypse; it is a poetic archival document of the emotional ecology in distress.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative, interdisciplinary, methods-based approach, drawing on affective ecocriticism, environmental humanities, and Romantic literary studies to analyze Lord Byron's "Darkness" (1816) within an affective ecology framework. The research examines not only the ecological context of the poem's creation but also the emotional modalities through which nature is experienced, imagined, and represented in the aftermath of the Tambora eruption. By situating Byron's work within both historical and environmental frameworks, the study highlights the interplay between ecological disruption and human affect in Romantic literature.

3.1. Theoretical Framework

The primary theoretical framework that informs this research is affective ecology. It is a new interdisciplinary framework that investigates the procedural interrelation of human feelings and ecological places through scholarly endeavors of Glenn A. Albrecht, Lawrence Buell, and Sara Ahmed. Albrecht (2005) introduced the concept of

solastalgia, providing a foundation for understanding the emotional impact of ecological disruption. while Buell (2005) emphasizes how literary texts articulate ecological consciousness through imaginative expression. Ahmed (2004) contributes a critical lens on the embodiment of emotion, highlighting how affect circulates between bodies and the environment. Affect is conceptualized as both embodied and ecological in that it is affected by and affects humans and their conditions. This research utilizes five key constructs:

Biophilia: It is the tendency of humans to connect with nature (Kellert & Wilson, 1993).

Naturalist intelligence: It refers to the cognitive and affective dimensions of recognizing, perceiving, interpreting, and relating to the natural environment (Gardner, 1999).

Fascination: It is the involuntary calling of attention and emotion with nature (Kaplan & Kaplan, 1989).

Affiliation: This encompasses feelings of belonging or togetherness with the natural world (Kals, Schumacher, & Montada, 1999).

Affective bonds: The affective bonds depend on emotional attachments to landscapes, species, or ecological phenomena (Kals et al., 1999).

These affective-ecological constructs contextualize the study of how or in what way the selected poetic work registers despair, anxiety, grief, and fear in response to climate instability and ecological disintegration.

3.2. Textual Corpus and Selection Criteria

This research focuses on the close reading of Lord Byron's "Darkness" (1816), composed during the "Year Without a Summer" (1816), invoked by Mount Tambora's eruption in 1815. "Darkness" was selected for its explicit engagement with ecological catastrophe and its ability to signify and encode climate-related affect. A single-text focus enables deep, nuanced interpretation within the limited scope of this study, offering a model for future comparative work. Complementary material evidence includes Byron's letters and journals, historical weather reports, and Romantic-period meditations on environmental instability, which can help contextualize the emotional climate within which he was writing.

3.3. Method of Analysis

The analysis proceeds in three interrelated stages.

3.3.1. Historical and Environmental Contextualization

Using historical primary source documents and climatological studies, this stage of analysis reconstructs the material and meteorological disruptions caused by the Tambora eruption. These registered mobilities are interpreted as part of the affective milieu in which Byron produced the writing, which provides a historically situated understanding of ecological dread, disorientation, and loss.

3.3.2. Affective-Ecological Close Reading

Through textual analysis, the study identifies the poetic representations of emotional reactions to environmental ruination. In-depth examination is performed to comprehend how the poem highlights broken biophilic tendencies, naturalist intelligence failures/distortions, fascination from awe to horrid paralysis, collapse of affiliation, and severed affective ties to the natural world. An exploration of metaphors and structural aspects is executed to demonstrate these affective processes.

3.3.3. Interdisciplinary Synthesis and Interpretation

Analysis from the close reading supplemented with affect theory and ecological psychology theorizes the poem as a precursor of collective eco-anxiety and affective dissonance. The analysis shows how not only were ecological

realities encoded by Byron's poetics, but also emotional ruptures to human-nature relationships, such that affective ecology became a central theoretical lens for the study.

3.4. Ethical and Scholarly Considerations

This research complies with the highest standards of scholarship, using peer-reviewed and archival sources in proper citation and verification. The analysis remains conscious of the limitations of a retrospective affective interpretation, engaging both historical context and theoretical insight with an optimal equilibrium.

4. AFFECTIVE DIMENSIONS IN "DARKNESS": ANALYSIS

This section interprets the affective-ecological implications in Lord Byron's "Darkness," drawing on close textual analysis in the context of post-Tambora environmental trauma. The metaphors of darkness, disintegration, disorientation, and despair function not only as poetic devices but also as vehicles of ecological emotions, revealing fractured human-nature relationships and registering the psychological consequences of ecological implosion.

4.1. The Collapse of Biophilia: Estrangement from Nature

Byron's poignant metaphor, "The bright sun was extinguished" (Byron, 1907) is the first chord in a poetic symphony of cosmic dislocation. It marks both the figurative and literal discontinuity of the most basic source of life and order in the natural world. The lost sun not only implies the physical absence of light but also the absence of being, the absence of the biophilic, or natural, connection that characterizes humanity's innate tendency to strive for closeness with nature. The sun is the cosmic emblem of life and experience, contractibility, and the cycles of time that nurture and perpetuate existence, which is obliterated. With its erasure, the emotional and ecological structures that connect a sense of human belonging with that in the natural world begin to come apart. This rupture is amplified by Byron's description of the Earth as, "a lump of death a chaos of hard clay" (Byron, 1907). Here, the Earth is stripped of all vitality and reduced to some dead object void of all biodiversity and sensory richness of being and spiritual resonance. It is no longer represented as a living and breathing ecosystem but refigured as a corpse. This type of imagery deepens not just ecological reflection, but the intensely emotional confrontation with the death of the biosphere. This is a poetic expression of what environmental philosopher (Albrecht, 2005) has called solastalgia - a deep psychic and emotional distress that is experienced when one's home environment is degraded beyond repair. Unlike nostalgia, solastalgia is not merely about being away from home; rather, it is a temporal disjunction that occurs when a coherent, life-sustaining world transforms into a catastrophe.

The historical context of "Darkness" (The eruption of Mount Tambora) adds further weight to these metaphors. The eruption created a catastrophic year that spanned almost the entire globe, characterized by darkness, the misery of failed harvests, and years of decline in global temperatures. In this context, Byron's imagery is not entirely metaphorical and is, in fact, deeply referential. The poem is making the collective trauma from once distant climatic realities into something lyrical and affective. The poem registers the destruction that unfolds outside and the disorientation produced on the inside. The metaphors are not only metaphors but act as affective mediators, moving us from horizons of environmental collapse to emotional realities. We have a world wherein nature no longer offers shelter and sustenance but exile and serious grief; a biosphere that is uninhabitable not only for creating the physical problem but for psychological/emotional impact as well. This section demonstrates the collapse of biophilia as articulated in "Darkness," grounding the poem's emotional landscape in both ecological trauma and the loss of innate natural connection.

4.2. Disorientation of Naturalist Intelligence

Lord Byron's imagery of the extinguishing sun and the Earth's transformation into a "lump of death" (Byron, 1907) demonstrates a rupture not just in biophilic connection, but in humanity's cognitive and affective relation to

any notion of nature. This breakdown is reflected in the metaphors "Rayless, and pathless, and the icy earth / Swung blind and blackening " (Byron, 1907), echoing the description of the collapse of naturalist intelligence: the ability to perceive, organize, and derive meaning from our environmental surroundings (Gardner, 1999). In Byron's apocalyptic vision, the natural world ceases to exist as a stable or interpretable system. The celestial rhythms we relied upon earlier for orienting time and continuity spiral into chaos: there is no sun, there are no lights from above, the earth swings off axis, without any particular axial focus. What was once a reliable epistemological anchor becomes a site of profound disorientation. Byron intensifies this sense of cognitive and affective unmooring in the line: "The pall of a past world" (Byron, 1907) a metaphor that casts the sky not as a source of light or revelation, but as a funerary shroud stretched over the corpse of a once-living planet. This metaphor is powerful as it displays a dramatic image of planetary death and its profound affective implications. By employing Ahmed (2004) concept of affective disorientation, we can see this transformational moment as one where environmental affect replaces reason when the atmosphere of loss and dread becomes the expressive mode through which we encounter the world and all it signifies. What had been a source of objectively assessable orientation, physically and emotionally, is now portrayed as hostile, opaque, and unreadable.

This dissolution of nature's intelligibility resonates significantly with historical conditions following the Tambora eruption, when extreme weather patterns manifested as catastrophic phenomena, were bewildering, and resulted in a collective psychological trauma to populations across Europe and elsewhere. The relationship that we hold with our environment cannot be fully rationalized or confidently theorized using prior frameworks to make sense of these alarming ruptures, if such a thing is even possible. Our old, now overturned beliefs restore significant tension for Byron, who metaphorically represents this interpretive crisis in a way that not only shows the physical damage caused by the eruption of Tambora but also what it devastatingly meant epistemically and emotionally. In summary, the poem propagates from the severing of our affective ties with Nature and on to the dissolution of our ability to think and feel about the natural world. The poem evokes an agential imaginary that renders Nature, once a site of intelligibility and aesthetic creativity, impenetrable and terrifying. In this way, Byron's work articulates what we might call an early modern ecological vertigo. It reflects on what it feels like to be disoriented in a world abandoned by familiar environmental or emotional points of reference. Thus, the poem dramatizes the collapse of naturalist intelligence by rendering the natural world cognitively unreadable and emotionally overwhelming.

4.3. From Sublime Fascination to Dread

The earlier Romanticism may have found the sublime as a dialectic of fear and reverence for the immensity of nature, whereas Byron's "Darkness" ruptures this notion by collapsing the sublime into a paralyzing awe of destruction. The metaphor "Darkness had no need of aid from them—She was the Universe" remains unchanged (Byron, 1907) suggests a radical transformation from the natural sublime to the cosmic void. Here, the darkness does not solely represent the lack of light, but it is also the controlling agency of the cosmos that has taken residence instead of celestial order, elemental rhythm, or biological sequence. In placing darkness as feminine and unfathomable dominion, Byron has established an impression of natural law inversion, which is more about destruction rather than creation. The emotion expressed here is not awe rooted in wonder, but awe shaped by fear and terror. This can be understood as an affective sublime, where the overwhelming absence disrupts comprehension, limits agency, and prevents any meaningful response.

This thematic turn is reinforced in Byron's haunting line: "The waves were dead... the winds were withered" (Byron, 1907). While the initial implication of these metaphors could be silence or stillness, in actuality, they connote a metaphysical lifelessness where a world devoid of motion or vitality represents the absence of meaning. Romanticism's interest in elemental force, which is typically used for spiritual or philosophical reflection, collapses in the experience of ecological totality. The waves symbolize fluidity, emotion, and cyclical nature; their apathy renders the sky unresponsive, as though severed from the elemental vitality it once mirrored; the winds, the common signifier

of breath, change, and inspiration, become synonymous with withered; they imply a vacuum rather than a sense of calm in the absence of emotional attachment to the physical world. This collapse from emotional intelligibility links to the psychological effects of Tambora. When Tambora disrupted weather systems across the Northern Hemisphere, it destabilized emotional experience in tandem with weather experiences. The familiar landscape became surreal; the seasons didn't exist; the aesthetic mandates that governed human-nature relations transformed into something alien. Byron, having lived through this crisis, captured it in the "Darkness" (1816) by collapsing the sublime into affective paralysis. The scale of destruction is so extravagant that it overwhelms human capabilities to such a degree that the poem itself becomes, in effect, an emotional archive of affective exhaustion. However, Byron's vision does not repudiate the sublime; rather, it radicalizes it, transforming it into a site of existential and ecological horror, as notions of Nature's magnificence are turned into a spectacle of irreversible collapse, one that negates the actual material structures of Earth but also the emotive and imaginative faculties through which humans have understood it in the past. In this way, Byron reorients the Romantic construct of fascination from an involuntary pull toward nature's grandeur to a paralyzing confrontation with nature's void, thereby revealing the emotional threshold of ecological collapse.

4.4. Breakdown of Affiliation and Social Ecology

Affiliation, seen as the emotional binding that links humans and non-humans alike, is being gradually dismantled in Byron's composition, yielding fragmentation, fear, and moral deterioration. The metaphor "All hearts were chill'd into a selfish prayer for light" (Byron, 1907) expresses this transition eloquently. Rather than a collective desire for survival, there was an individual, atomized instinct. Not only has social affection gone cold, but the warmth of "all hearts" has been prioritized over the cold logic of self-preservation. Thus, the metaphor not only registers a lack of something physical but also exposes an affective loss of connection to others. As environmental stability crumbles, so too does social stability. Those elements once relied upon to foster a community identity have devolved into the self-absorption of individual liquidity. Byron emphasizes this sense of emotional detachment when he writes, 'each sate sullenly apart/Gorging himself in gloom" (Byron, 1907), an image that reveals the psychological and moral ramifications of extreme hunger. Eating rituals that were formerly composed, mindful, and social become grotesque acts of solitary consumption. Famine transcends itself as a physiological condition initiating this collapse of ethical relations. This notion of emotional detachment climaxes with one of the most disturbing fragments in the poem: "The meagre by the meagre were devour'd" (Byron, 1907). Cannibalism is an act that tends to exist solely as a horror of the body, yet in this instance, it can be read metaphorically as one depicting a lost self where hunger erases borders of identity, empathy, and civilization. The human body is also no longer untouchable or abstracted, and eating becomes the field of survivalist consumption. Underneath the ecological collapse, even the corporeal form becomes a container ripe for consumption. In affective-ecological terms, this fracture of human affiliation mirrors the larger breakdown of affiliations in nature itself, where interdependent relations between species collapse under the weight of environmental trauma. Byron's imagery merges the decay of human emotional architectures with an environmental decay of ecological affiliations.

Arguably, the most spiritually devastating metaphor in the poem is of the desecrated altar: "holy things/ For unholy uses" (Byron, 1907). In this metaphor, the ritual signaled the end of moral and emotional affiliation. That which once held communities together in symbolic reverence now becomes fuel for base survival. The altar, a space that would have previously been reserved for transgressive communion between people, gods, and nature, is bereft of sanctity and, worse, turned into a site of desperation. In affective-ecological terms, this registers a collapse of the symbolic and emotional scaffolding necessary to sustain ethical life. Byron offers a disquieting vision of what happens when environmental trauma exceeds the threshold for meaning-making: not only is the biosphere rendered inhospitable, but so too are the social and moral frameworks that would define humanity. "Darkness" does not just present an ecological disaster; it also stages the psychosocial entropy that accompanies failed affiliation. It shows how

environmental collapse, such as that comprising a Tambora eruption, can erode the emotional architectures that organize social ties, and how this transforms relational life into a contest of isolated, despairing bodies in the dark. This sacrilege also signifies the rupture of affiliations between the human, non-human, and the sacred, affecting the ecology of affect that supported shared meanings in continuity.

4.5. Severed Affective Bonds and Emotional Numbness

As Kals et al. (1999) argue, affective bonds shape the emotional ecology of our relationship with life; "Darkness" (1816) imagines a world in which those bonds are not maintained any further. The work contains one of the most painful emotional ruptures, exemplified by the companionable animal: "Faithful to a corpse… licking the hand / Which answered not with a caress he died" (Byron, 1907). As a moment of intense feeling, it marks the tragic disintegration of one of the most elemental forms of feeling, that is, the human connection to a nonhuman friend. In this action, as the dog licks its dead master's inanimate hand, it extends a final act of love between species, unreciprocated in an atmosphere devoid of human affect or ethics. Byron compresses the enormity of the emotional cost of planetary collapse into an intensely personal and haunting rendering. The death of the dog indicates more than the physical consequences of death from famine or exposure; it indicates the death of reciprocal feeling. Affection can no longer circulate or be returned. The web of life is severed effectively, becoming empty of meaning, which closely approximates ecological nihilism in relation to both the dead and the living. This feeling of total emotional disintegration is enhanced in the anxiety of the poem's last human being, the last two survivors who are remnants of an obviously "near-immortal," vast, civilized humanity. The stanza concludes with the metaphor, "shriek'd, and died / Even of their mutual hideousness" (Byron, 1907). At the end, these lines crystallize a grotesque, visceral, and existential moment, the utter collapse of affectivity, so complete that even recognition, one of the last remnants of relational humanity, is utterly denied. Their shrieks are not cries of hope or mourning, but shrieks of horror at each other's mere existence. The encounter between the two survivors becomes an event of obliteration, rather than a bond or a means of survival. The scene depicts a sensation of radical affective alienation, where each is simply horrified to see another human face.

Byron amplifies this emotional descent when he writes "Famine had written Fiend" (Byron, 1907). Hunger here is more than a physiological condition; it is a metaphysical force that erases the human spirit and writes monstrosity onto the body. The alliterative violence of "Famine" and "Fiend" indicates an internalized transformation from deprivation, during which survivors become "horrors," "monsters," and fundamentally unrecognizable. This process constitutes the end of empathy, recognition, and corporeal moral identity; as famine consumes the body, it also obliterates the emotional landscape, leaving behind only affective voids and psychic ruins. These metaphors may have been shaped by Byron's direct and indirect exposure to the landscape of widespread famine and human suffering that swept across Europe in the aftermath of the Tambora eruption. The food shortages, starvation, and scenes of social collapse that followed the "Year Without a Summer" (1816) likely informed the poem's visceral imagery of hunger, cannibalism, and emotional breakdown, making "Darkness" (1816) not just an imaginative apocalypse but also a poetic reflection of contemporary environmental and humanitarian crisis.

Collectively, the metaphors evoke a deeply tragic arc in the ecology of grief. Byron does more than mourn the billowing degradation of the environment; he makes accessible the extremes of the emotional life, the disquiet of what it means when affection, care, and relational meaning are impossible in a world ripped by planetary collapse. The poem becomes a psychic autopsy of a world where grief is not so much the response to loss but a condition of existence, a condition of being, a terror that transcends the immediate effect of death across an organism's lifetime, standing only to outlast the very conditions of love, mourning, or peace of mind. Table 1 presents the affective-ecological mapping of metaphors in "Darkness" (1816), illustrating how they function as constructions of biophilia, affiliated with affective bonds, prompting a better understanding of the poetry's documentation of ecological grief, ecological anxiety, and ecological despair in response to the Tambora eruption and environmental collapse.

Table 1. Affective-ecological mapping of metaphors in Lord Byron's *darkness*.

Metaphor / Line	Affective construct(s)	Associated emotion(s)	Tambora effect reflected
"The bright sun was extinguish'd"	Biophilia, naturalist intelligence	Despair, cosmic disorientation	Solar dimming; collapse of natural cycles and life rhythms
"A lump of death, a chaos of hard clay"	Biophilia	Grief, ecological mourning	Total ecological sterility; emotional recognition of Earth as lifeless.
"A world of exile and serious grief"	Affective bonds	Grief, displacement	Alienation from nature; emotional uninhabitability of the world.
"Rayless, and pathless, and the icy earth / Swung blind and blackening"	Naturalist intelligence	Anxiety, disorientation	Loss of celestial orientation; disrupted climate patterns; frozen summer.
"The pall of a past world"	Naturalist intelligence, affective disorientation	Grief, cognitive paralysis	Sky as a funerary shroud: mourning the epistemic collapse of the natural world
"Darkness had no need of aid from them—She was the Universe"	Fascination, affective sublime	Dread, cosmic fear, awe	Loss of celestial order; psychological response to atmospheric inversion
"The waves were dead... the winds were wither'd"	Biophilia, fascination	Grief, emotional paralysis	Stagnation of ocean and atmosphere; sensory numbness post-Tambora.
"All hearts were chill'd into a selfish prayer for light"	Affiliation, affective bonds	Despair, isolation	Emotional withdrawal; collapse of collective empathy due to prolonged darkness and scarcity.
"Each sate sullenly apart / Gorging himself in gloom"	Affiliation	Emotional detachment, moral numbness	Famine disrupts eating, psychological withdrawal, and solitude.
"The meagre by the meagre were devour'd"	Affiliation, affective bonds	Horror, existential alienation	Cannibalism as a metaphor for societal breakdown and survivalist ethics under extreme famine.
"Holy things / For unholy uses"	Affiliation, moral sentiment	Spiritual despair, ethical collapse	Desecration of sacred sites for survival; symbolic erosion of communal and religious values.
"Faithful to a corse… licking the hand / Which answer'd not with a caress he died"	Affective bonds	Grief, emotional abandonment, ecological nihilism	Collapse of interspecies empathy; emotional void under famine and death
"They shriek'd, and died / Even of their mutual hideousness"	Affective bonds, affiliation	Fear, radical alienation, loss of recognition	Breakdown of human solidarity; relational collapse under existential crisis
"Famine had written Fiend"	Moral sentiment, naturalist intelligence	Horror, dehumanization, affective ruin	Hunger-induced loss of identity; psychological transformation under ecological trauma

5. INTERDISCIPLINARY SYNTHESIS: "DARKNESS" AS AN ECO-CONSCIOUS ARCHIVE

Byron's "Darkness" (1816) is not only a work of apocalyptic imagination but an affective construction, a poetic archive of the psychic and ecological trauma wrought by the eruption of Mount Tambora (1815). Its dense network of metaphors, of severance, negation, and radical change, creates an emotional ecology in which the exterior devastation of climate collapse is transformed into internal forms of moral and psychological disintegration. The darkened skies, failed crops, social rupture, and spiritual emptiness that followed Tambora are not merely historical outcomes but ontological transformations in what it means to be human when the nonhuman world no longer sustains or even acknowledges human subjects. Importantly, "Darkness" foresaw what we call eco-anxiety long before it entered the language of climate psychology or environmental humanities. With its lyrics plunging into despair, fear, grief, and affective paralysis, this poem records the emotional intensity that arises when recognizable environmental

formations crumble. It dramatizes the unraveling of meaning that happens when nature is no longer a place of sense, beauty, or spiritual solace but has become a site of unintelligibility and horror. In this discussion, the poem is not just depicting an environmental disaster; it enacts its emotional aftermath.

Situated within affective ecology, this project demonstrates how Byron's metaphors illuminate the intensities shared between environmental crisis and emotional life. This theoretical engagement allows us to understand "Darkness" not as a detached Romantic abstraction but as a profoundly embodied response to climatic crisis. Through the progressive collapse of biophilia, naturalist intelligence, fascination, affiliation, and affective bonds, Byron encodes an emotional ecology that mirrors ecological devastation. The crumbling away of biophilic attachment, the rupturing of naturalist intelligence, the splintering of social and interspecies attachment, and saturation of grief all suggest that emotional ecosystems are disaggregating as ecological ones do. In the end, the poem showcases the substantive value of Romantic literature in processing the affective aspects of environmental collapse. It illustrates not only what is lost in the wake of ecological calamity but also what that loss feels like, demonstrating how it shifts the rhythms of perception, the fibers of affect, and the senses of attachment. Through this, Byron's poem transforms from a literary product into an emotional record of climate history, providing a prescient account of the psychic toll of environmental trauma. It prompts readers to study the Romantic archive not only for aesthetics but for its ethical potential as a site where human feeling and planetary precarity are irrevocably enmeshed.

6. LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

6.1. Restricted Textual Scope

While the study engages with broader Romantic contexts, its primary focus remains on Lord Byron's "Darkness" (1816), which limits the transferability of its affective-ecological insights. A comparative analysis involving multiple Romantic texts could have offered a wider spectrum of emotional responses to environmental crises, highlighting diverse affective registers across different authors, poetic forms, and cultural contexts.

6.2. Retrospective Application of Contemporary Frameworks

This study applies contemporary theoretical concepts such as affective ecology and solastalgia to a nineteenth-century literary text. While this approach offers valuable insights, interpreting Romantic-era metaphors through present-day emotional and ecological frameworks carries the risk of retrospective projection, potentially leading to anachronistic readings that may not fully align with how Byron's original audience understood the text.

6.3. Interpretative Subjectivity in Metaphor Classification

The close reading and metaphor classification employed in this study are necessarily subjective. The emotional meanings attached to particular metaphors may vary among scholars, even within similar theoretical frameworks, which may affect the consistency and replicability of the analysis.

6.4. Scope of Affective Constructs

The study focuses primarily on four dominant emotions: despair, fear, grief, and anxiety derived from the affective ecology model. However, other nuanced emotional states that may be present in the poem were not examined in detail, which may result in a somewhat limited representation of the poem's complete affective spectrum.

7. CONCLUSION

Byron's "Darkness" (1816) offers more than a Romantic meditation on the apocalyptic end of the world; it is a poetic document that registers the affective impact of planetary disorder. By employing the affective ecological framework, this study demonstrates the manner in which the poem translates atmospheric trauma into the poetics of emotional destabilization. The breakdown of metaphoric coherence in "Darkness," such as extinguished sun, failing

stars, and hostile nature, mirrors a psychological fracture within the human-nature relationship, a sense of solastalgia that anticipates the emotional experiences now associated with climate anxiety. By situating Byron's work in the emotional climate of 1816, this analysis contributes to a broader rethinking of Romanticism as not only imaginative or visionary but also ecologically realistic and affectively attuned. As environmental humanities continue to explore the intersections of literature, emotion, and ecological collapse, "Darkness" reminds us that the history of eco-anxiety begins long before the Anthropocene was named and that Romanticism still has much to teach us about surviving in the ruins of a damaged planet.

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