John Witt II

Dr. Katie Cortese

ENGL 3351

8 June 2025

The Song of the Mountain

I could feel the cool breeze displacing locks of thick chestnut hair from my forehead. Looking around, I could see that I was in a familiar valley—I hadn’t been here before, but it felt almost as if I had grown up here. The autumn sun blanketed the lush greenery that surrounded me, featuring waist-high grass and flowered bushes that dotted the area. Dividing the valley was a calm river, lazily pushing clear mountain water downstream. On the bank of the river sat an empty wooden rowboat. A low, loud grumble polluted the air, and I began to fall through the ground. Another low grumble, louder, and I was violently stirred awake from my afternoon nap.

Confused and irritated, I stumbled to my feet. A blurry view of the island’s fishing port greeted me, and I knuckled my eyes to clear the grogginess. As I tried to regain my bearings, I could hear panicked yells piercing a deep growl from the earth—another earthquake, I assumed. These had been happening frequently lately, and the village leaders were suggesting that it was because we had angered the Mountain God. The spirit of the Mountain God lived in the mountain that occupied most of our island home of Thera, and we regularly gave offerings to appease her. Our vegetation over the past moon cycles had wilted, though, causing a food shortage and leaving very little excess for us to offer. Complicating matters, fish had become scarce near the island. Getting enough food to feed a single family had become a chore, and securing enough food to feed the village was almost impossible. Now she grumbled at us night and day, scolding us for our unfaithful display of greed. Today seemed different, though.

The ground shook viciously under my feet, and a powerful scent permeated the area. Houses carefully constructed with cut stone buckled—some of them collapsing. My eyes darted to the mountain above, and billowing black smoke told me immediately that we had tested the Mountain God’s limits for the last time.

Behind me, men on modest fishing boats began to cry out as the sea swallowed their vessels. The water, boiling with the wrath of the Mountain God, extinguished their cries as their man-made crafts sank beneath the waves. I felt sick, seeing their fate and feeling as if judgment would inevitably meet all of us before the day’s end. I hopped off the dock, which was heating rapidly, and onto the rocky beach. I felt an unavoidable sense of doom, as if an unfathomably large, invisible, divine hand were stretched over Thera, threatening at any moment to fall and reduce the village to corpses and rubble.

An explosion from the mountain caused smoke to block the sun and ash to rain from the sky. Rocky debris began to slide down the mountain, followed by divine blood glowing in the darkness. Despite the heavy smoke cover, I could still see it from the beach as I worked my way toward the far side of the island. I heard a small voice call out to me from a nearby collapsed dwelling, a child calling for help. Rushing over, I saw a young girl pinned under the collapsed timber roofing of her house. Without thinking, I began removing pieces of timber as quickly as I could. I told her not to cry—that she would be alright very soon—but it was fruitless; by the time I had made any difference in the volume of demolished house that was crushing her, the child had stopped moving and appeared to no longer be breathing. The world seemed to slow down around me in that moment. I wanted to cry, to beg for mercy, to grieve the unimaginable devastation to our village. I couldn’t make my body move or feel. Was I still dreaming? Was this real?

Following that brief moment, I again broke for my destination at the far end of Thera. Visibility was limited, though, and the air was getting much harder to breathe. Luckily, I spotted a cave that had been carved out as a cove long ago, though the tide had since permanently receded from it. Ducking inside, I pulled my wool tunic over my face and cowered in a back corner. I was finally crying, but I wasn’t sure if it was because of the smoke or because of what I had seen during the awful vengeance of the Mountain God. What would become of me? Was anybody else still alive? The frantic screams from the village, which was still close, had vanished. All I could hear and feel was the song of the Mountain God. The air itself began to cook, and I choked on its heat and density.

I awoke in a familiar valley, but it was covered in snow. Surrounding me were the other villagers, who appeared morose but otherwise radiant. There were more boats now, each one filled with faces I knew and faces I hadn’t met. The young girl I had tried to save waved at me from nearby. Smiling, she motioned towards her parents. None of us could speak, but the sentiment was clear.

One by one, we boarded the boats and let the clear and lazy mountain water carry us away.