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Book Author(s): ALESSA JOHNS

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Representing Vesuvius

Northern European Tourists and the Napoleonic Culture of War

The volcano would appear an irresistible metaphor for social upheaval, but it came to denote political eruption generally only in the late eighteenth century with reference to the French Revolution and the Napoleonic wars. Writers talked about a “political volcano” that “had broken out in France, and was sweeping over Europe like a sea of lava”; “Um jene Zeit war Frankreich namentlich ein fortbrennender politischer Vulkan”; “L’Europe . . . savait bien que la France est le volcan politique du monde.”¹ The comparison was employed both by those for as well as those against political and armed conflict. On the one hand the volcano metaphor was used to incite soldiers and convince the public of the need for battle, of the excitement of a sublime display of might, of the natural, periodic quality of eruption, and of the renewing and regenerating consequences of those released powers.² Georg Forster, representing the Mainz Republic, wrote from Paris: “The lava of the Revolution flows majestically and no longer spares anything”; “You see the volcano is not yet silent; the earth still quakes under our feet.”³ With the bloodshed of the Terror, the massacres of the Vendée, and the slaughter of the Napoleonic wars, such radical and liberal thinkers became deeply disillusioned. However, the language of eruption had entered the European vocabulary and came to be used in various political contexts throughout the nineteenth century. It even made its way to Latin America, where Simón Bolívar, after the defeat of Spain, termed the oppressed masses “a great volcano [that] lies at our feet.”⁴

Even as the volcano metaphor conveyed excitement, it served as criticism. It expressed indignation at the violence, chaos, and unpredictable and uncontrollable forces unleashed in battle, resulting in social turmoil, destruction, and death, with future eruptions always to be feared. A late nineteenth-century commentator concluded: "FRANCE has been the political volcano of Europe. . . . The lava-torrents of human blood that have accompanied its frequent eruptions have, each in its turn, either destroyed one system of government or marked the inauguration of another. . . . Is the volcano extinct, or is it smouldering still?"⁵ In 1842 a British traveler to Germany judged that "France has been from age to age . . . something more than leaven; it has been the political volcano of Europe, hurling forth on all sides its burning cinders and scalding lava. No country has felt this so much as Germany: it is probable that none is destined still to feel it more."⁶

Vesuvius in particular came to be associated with the Napoleonic wars, since Naples was an important flashpoint.⁷ In 1799, the French general Jean Étienne Championnet attempted to create a "Parthenopean Republic" of the Kingdom of Naples, which resulted in a gathering insurgency that later reunited and feistily opposed Napoleon's inroads from 1806 to 1810. As punishment entire villages were burnt and the inhabitants ruthlessly slaughtered, in a pattern that had been employed a decade earlier to squelch the rebellion in the French Vendée.⁸ Neapolitans themselves were compared with their eruptive terrain: "the most dreadful revolts of the Italians against foreign occupation took place in those torrid regions, where it seems that the force and brutal riot of men vie with the subterranean fires and ruinous tremors of the earth and sea"; "Neapolitans, like their volcanic country, are never in a state of repose."⁹

Susan Sontag's popular novel *The Volcano Lover* (1992) took up the theme of Neapolitan explosivity, using Vesuvius to weave together images of eighteenth-century political, scientific, affective, aesthetic, and military eruptions with a focus on William Hamilton, British envoy to Naples from 1764 to 1800, who avidly studied earthquakes and volcanoes, completed nearly a hundred ascents of Vesuvius, and eagerly collected antiquities. He published *Observations on Mount Vesuvius, Mount Etna, and Other Volcanoes* (1772) as well as *Campi Phlegraei* (1776), a fantastic folio volume illustrated by Pietro Fabris with fifty-nine hand-colored copper engravings, an extravagant forerunner of the modern coffee-table book. Sontag's novel explores the erotics of Hamilton's obsessive volcano-observation, artifact collecting, and active role as host to travelers of all nationalities.

He regularly displayed his vases and also his wife, Emma, who performed “Attitudes,” solo tableaux vivants representing moments from ancient myths by using as props only a shawl and her long hair.¹⁰ Emma Hamilton took as a lover Lord Horatio Nelson, the celebrated hero of the Battle of the Nile (1798) who later commanded the victorious Battle of Trafalgar (1805) in which he was killed. Exploring the full range of the volcano metaphor, Sontag thus included not only the sexual passions of the protagonists, the obsessive hunt for rare antiquities, and the risky pursuit of geological knowledge, but also the bloody counterrevolution in Naples and the pitched sea battles involving Admiral Nelson.

Sontag consciously followed in the footsteps of Swiss author Germaine de Staël, whose travel-novel *Corinne, or Italy* (1807) demonstrated how Vesuvius as symbol could critique Napoleon’s dictatorial, military culture as well as the social inequity and gender-role oppression bred by it. The volcano provides the dramatic setting for the turning point of the novel.¹¹ There the main characters, Corinne and Oswald (the British Lord Nelvil), finally reveal their backgrounds and confess their secrets. Oswald’s is sorrow: a French woman’s betrayal and the death of his father, with consequent guilt and remorse making it impossible for him to marry Corinne. These dark feelings are attributed to excessive paternal authority and oppressive social norms that inevitably debilitate a sensitive and decent person, and they are likened to the relentlessly encroaching lava the pair sees killing everything in its way. “The river of fire which was flowing down from Vesuvius . . . had a keen effect on Oswald’s troubled imagination”; it revealed “a funereal colour . . . dark, like the picture of hell in one’s imagination.”¹² Vesuvius represents deadly sexual politics, the forging of a gender ideology suffocating to Oswald, stifling to Lucile (the proper young English girl he marries), and fatal to Corinne.

Napoleon exiled Staël, who used her ten-year period of banishment to gain knowledge, write, and make friends and allies on her travels; “I became European,” she said. Angelica Goodden has recently viewed Staël’s biography in terms of her exile and her challenges to Napoleon: “At Coppet she assembled a group of friends whose limited real power was belied by their ability to goad and incite; in Germany she put together an intellectual and artistic arsenal (later given literary form in *De l’Allemagne*) that seemed to threaten Bonaparte’s imperialist ambitions; and she turned Italy into a living denial of his hegemony.”¹³ The use of Vesuvius in *Corinne* thus formed part of a larger transnational political project. It is a deadly obstacle at the center of the novel’s landscape; it

represents forces with which the characters try to cope but which ultimately control and stifle their lives. Corinne the character, representing Italy, portrays the devastation following revolution; *Corinne* the novel, offering a tour through the country, displaying the admirable monuments of antiquity, argues the need for sound rule and just institutions as the way of creating a truly free people. The emphasis is on civilization over eruption, reform over revolution, as in women's and society's best interests.

1. *Situating Travel Accounts*

Indeed, Staël's novel—both fiction and travelogue—employs Vesuvius in ways similar to nonfiction travel accounts of Naples at the end of the eighteenth and the beginning of the nineteenth centuries. In this chapter I will consider these travel narratives within the *terrains vastes* to show how British-German transfer was affected during the unsettling Napoleonic period and after. Differences between the two northern countries receded as mutual opposition to French aggression and occupation came to the fore. British and German tourists, able to travel again following the end of hostilities, moved in a landscape that announced their place in a new order whose strict economic, political, and gender organization as yet had no name but could be felt, absorbed, and inscribed. Consequently, as in Staël's novel, the travel accounts of Naples offer strikingly gendered discussions of Vesuvius. They point to disparate understandings of power and agency and query the place of affect in a changing sociopolitical and economic context. Travel writers employ Vesuvius to address simultaneously the personal and political: British and German men and women register their distinct responses to international and sexual politics in the context of the increasing masculinism, militarism, and nationalism of their time. Cultural transfer in the form of travel writings about Vesuvius in this period therefore reveals meanings that go well beyond individuals' experience of Italian antiquity and *la dolce vita* to analyses of individual, national, and gender identity within the turbulent power politics of a restive Europe.

The volcano in general gained its political meaning in consequence of what David A. Bell has termed Napoleon's culture of "total war": "a kind of warfare whose scale had little or no precedent, whether in the mobilization of population and resources, the ambitious and ill-defined war aims, the demonization of entire enemy populations, or the threats

to the French leadership in case of defeat. It was a perceived war to the death.”¹⁴ Women were rendered peripheral to the masculine military culture formed in the period 1794–1814. Earlier, in the aristocratic culture of combat, women actually played a part. Men were urged “to fight bravely and gloriously but also with restraint, with self-control, with honor”; rulers were first and foremost warriors, who led their men in battle and recognized advantages to limiting the scope and damage. As a common occurrence, war was viewed as an ordinary part of the social order, and women were active supporters and even muses: aristocratic officers carried on amours, wrote their lovers poetry about battlefield valor and conducted epistolary flirtations between skirmishes, while wives, with their servants, followed the troops to help sustain the war effort. Bell reports that General John Burgoyne’s defeat at Saratoga in the American Revolution was sometimes blamed “on the 2000 women who accompanied his 4700-man army.”¹⁵

If women became peripheral to the new culture of total war (except, as Napoleon told Staël, to birth soldiers¹⁶), they were also relative newcomers to the Grand Tour and were certainly a minority among climbers of Vesuvius. This meant, however, that they had some space to innovate in their travel reports and to formulate critique, since expectations were not well defined. Men apparently found less room for maneuver. Despite their varied nationalities and political persuasions, male travel-narrators, perhaps in the way of soldiers compelled to fight in Napoleonic conflicts, generally ended up employing the modern tactics and modes necessary to prevail: in their narrative accounts of Vesuvius they grasped for the romantic sublime.

It should be noted that though I am suggesting that gender differences in the travelogues trump national ones, I am concentrating on writers’ specific responses to the volcano in its Neapolitan setting at a particular point in history. Although scholars have carefully analyzed Grand Tour travel narratives in general with regard to questions of gender, they have not come to a consensus on the meaning of differences between male- and female-authored travel accounts. This is not surprising, given the enormous geographical and temporal scope of such analyses; however, scholars do agree that the accounts record gender differences. Barbara Korte says that female and male authors “share many characteristics” but that women “associate journeys with an escape from ‘normal’ life” and that their narratives “express a counter-discourse to this life.”¹⁷ In *Ladies of the Grand Tour* Brian Dolan anatomizes women’s responses to the many issues they confronted—education, fashion, politics, manners,

art, health—and concludes that overall “men’s travel accounts are preoccupied with conquest, connoisseurship and domestication of the wild, [while] women’s narratives record more diverse experiences concerned with individual growth, independence and health.”¹⁸ Chloe Chard notes that female travelers could “claim an additional authority by reference to their gender” as they enjoyed a “privileged opportunity to enquire into female manners,” and she argues that a “conjunction between the antique and the feminine” was established; however, she ultimately sees male and female authors operating within the same discursive template, which shapes their responses to the extent that foreign women become general “metaphors for difference, unfamiliarity and mysterious otherness.”¹⁹ Elizabeth Bohls argues that female travelers, unlike men, were empowered by class but disempowered by gender; they “did not fit the traveler’s image as heroic explorer, scientist, or authoritative cultural interpreter,” and as a result their travel accounts were “deeply divided.”²⁰ Focusing on Italy, Mirella Agorni takes note of political differences; women’s “images of Italy . . . [seem] to be used instrumentally to foreground the possibility that their egalitarian claims . . . could be legitimized by the culture of their time.”²¹ I agree with Agorni that a focus on specific subjects rather than broad responses to travel in general best allows one to analyze how gender might work within travel narratives. Consequently I highlight a single location at a critical sociopolitical juncture to facilitate comparison between travelers’ entanglement in the discourses of eruption.

The rhetoric of the volcano, including its use as a metaphor for political conflict and war, affected the experience and discourses of Grand Tourists; their travel accounts reveal the mountain as means of both reinforcing and critiquing transnational cultural norms and gender roles. That is, militarized culture inspired travel narratives that reinscribed or challenged the gendering of Vesuvius representations, deepening the period’s obsession with sex and gender. More broadly, as Gary Kelly has argued, such literary moves sought to define what kind of subject was to populate the emerging liberal state, a point to which I will return below.²²

A comparison of two related poems by Felicia Hemans, Britain’s most popular early nineteenth-century poet, will serve to demonstrate the thematic link between the Napoleonic wars and Vesuvian eruption even as it shows vividly the clear gender distinctions that emerged from the encounters. “Casabianca,” Hemans’s best-known poem (1826), describes a dutiful boy who stands amid shell fire on a burning ship, waiting for his father to command him to leave his post during the Battle of the

Nile (1798). "The boy stood on the burning deck, / Whence all but him had fled; / The flame that lit the battle's wreck / Shone round him o'er the dead" (lines 1–4). Not knowing that his father has been killed, the boy persists though all others have left, and he is blasted away when the flames reach the ship's store of gunpowder. So it is not enemy fire that ultimately kills him, but "friendly" powder, a circumstance that adds to the poem's irony and pathos. On the one hand, the verses celebrate the boy's innocent loyalty to his father and his patriotism to his country; on the other hand, and more emphatically, they represent a waste of valuable life and love, as the last lines suggest: "But the noblest thing that perish'd there / Was that young faithful heart" (ll. 39–40).

Hemans's 1827 poem "The Image in Lava" likewise takes up a historical subject; it concerns the archaeological discovery at Herculaneum of the impression of a woman grasping her child, unearthed remains of the Vesuvian eruption of 79 AD. The volcano here creates a "monument," but one "cast in affection's mould" (ll. 35–36). Hemans contrasts the "human love" of the powerless mother and child, an emotion in which one can have faith, with the fleeting fame of mighty men and their institutions, epitomized by the image of the phallic "temple and tower": "Temple and Tower have moulder'd, / Empires from earth have pass'd, / And woman's heart hath left a trace / Those glories to outlast! / And childhood's fragile image, / Thus fearfully enshrined, / Survives the proud memorials rear'd / By conquerors of mankind" (ll. 5–12). Hemans's reflection on mother love came in the year her own much-loved mother died, with verses on misplaced trust perhaps recalling how her husband, a military veteran, abandoned her, pregnant with their fifth son, and moved to Italy in 1818. Her mother then helped her care for her family. Indeed men in this poem do not participate in "human love" at all; men's love of women proves as untrustworthy as men's love of fame (see esp. lines 26–28, 39–40). Hemans deploys a resonant image of a woman, not to avoid probing the actual costs of catastrophe, but in order to expose them, in order directly to critique a masculine drive for mastery that renders mother love so vulnerable.

Significantly, the poem ends on a question. The speaker asserts mother love to be "immortal" and thereby apparently only a more permanent memorial than the "temples and towers" of the conquerors. But at the same time such love gives off an "earthly glow," not a heavenly one, and it is the "ashes" that exude its "holiness." The images are surprisingly untranscendent. The speaker cannot ultimately be certain of the immortality of human love, though she desperately wishes it: "Love, human

love! what art thou? . . . / Immortal, oh! immortal / Thou art, whose earthly glow / Hath given these ashes holiness—/ It must, it *must* be so!” (ll. 41–44). Susan Wolfson has noted that a Hemans poem often contains “unexpected surprises” and can be “at war with its lesson.”²³ Grant Scott has suggested, “If it were not for the last line, ‘The Image in Lava’ might be seen as an anti-monument poem that nonetheless appropriates the rhetoric of monumentality to celebrate the immortality of its subject. But,” he concludes, “the final stanza reveals a hint of skepticism.”²⁴

Hemans introduces a moment of skepticism shared by female travelers who visited Herculaneum. Vesuvius’s threat to civilization lay not simply in its capacity to overwhelm the “temples and towers” but to wipe out the human connections that those towers existed to defend in the first place. In a down-to-earth calculation of costs, Hemans privileges human emotion and human ties and implicitly rejects the quest for transcendence. Therefore while both “Casabianca” and “The Image in Lava” depict a failure on the part of parents to protect their children (and themselves) from deadly forces, the failure in “Casabianca” is one of utter loss, the destruction of innocent life through a ruinous masculine war that, in a bitter irony, dispatches a father who cannot do his duty to his own dutiful son. “The Image in Lava” in contrast conveys heroism in the mother’s final embraces of her child and explicitly condemns the masculine forces that pretend—but fail—to sustain civilization. Hemans is by no means the only writer to make this argument; a similar theme is simultaneously and extensively treated by Mary Shelley in *The Last Man* (1826), in which natural catastrophe exacerbated by war nearly wipes out human civilization.²⁵

Gary Kelly implies the comparison with Shelley’s novel as he helpfully contrasts Felicia Hemans’s aim of limning a “Romantic death” that is meaningful in the face of the “mass death” of the Revolution and Napoleonic Wars:

Romantic death . . . was increasingly set against and in relationship to several other figures. These include natural cataclysms such as storm, flood, and volcanic eruption; biological disaster such as pandemics; and historical catastrophes such as the fall of empires and the disappearance of entire peoples and civilizations into the abyss of oblivion. These figures were deployed in literature and culture mainly in relation to forms of mass death; they embodied widespread anxiety about the process of history as read through the prolonged global crisis of Revolutionary and Napoleonic disruption and violence, which was

perceived at the time as an unprecedented and profoundly transformative world-historical event. Romantic death was figured as meaningful death and set against the meaninglessness of mass death, which in turn was widely used to summarize or represent the Revolution and the Napoleonic adventure.²⁶

Kelly sees Hemans's depictions of good, Romantic death "serving the liberal ideology of the autonomous sovereign subject,"²⁷ in contrast to the illiberal implications of mass death, but this view is complicated by the insistence on human connection that recurs consistently in women's writings: the sovereign liberal subject is not an individualist one nor even simply independent. The mother's heroism in "The Image in Lava" consisted in the loving embrace of her child, not independent defiance of overwhelming power. The sublimity required for representing the sovereign self tends not to be forthcoming in women's works, as they seek to redefine heroism. Both Hemans's poems and Shelley's long novel were written after Napoleon's death but in the midst of a British crisis leading up to the Reform Bill of 1832 that threatened to unleash revolutionary activity if social change were not forthcoming.²⁸ These female authors were concerned to warn against and forestall the development in Britain of a culture of combat that could result in mass violence. Their position, however, was problematical since the figures of bonding sentiment and harmonious domesticity used to counter brutal images of violence and death failed to introduce a hoped-for era of communal peace, and instead circumscribed the authors' social influence through domestication and privatization and finally led to their devaluation as writers altogether. The effect of their work was indeed, as Gary Kelly has argued, the delineation of the modern liberal subject, even though, I would suggest, they had harbored hopes of a communal, utopian end.

2. *Containment versus Instrumentalization*

Prerevolutionary accounts of Vesuvius foreshadowed many of Hemans's and Shelley's concerns with loss and destruction, so that pressing post-revolutionary themes regarding war, bravery, and death dovetailed easily with and could supplement the treatment of disaster brought up by images of the volcano. In the earlier, prerevolutionary accounts we see contrasting sublime versus sentimental experiences of Vesuvius following upon Edmund Burke's analysis of the sublime and the beauti-

ful and William Gilpin's popular notion of the picturesque. Employing these discourses, many female travel writers sought to debunk myths of a feminine nature, which they contained—framed and distanced—via the picturesque, while the majority of male Grand Tourists engaged in self-fashioning via the sublime. Consequently Vesuvius, after the revolution, became a natural locus for debating the concatenation of politics and sexual politics, with containment of the mountain's threat emphasized on the one hand and its instrumentalization stressed on the other.

The volcano offered a climax to the Grand Tour. Naples generally represented the southernmost point of the journey, after which tourists turned around to head home, and the ascent of Mount Vesuvius was the culmination. In 1786 British tourist Hester Lynch Piozzi began a typical ascent of Vesuvius, which involved being strapped up and carried by porters. Usually visitors stopped halfway up the mountain at the Hermitage, a hostel that provided welcome refreshment: a wine called *Lacrimae Christi*, grown on the slopes of Vesuvius in the superb volcanic soil. Piozzi, a sociable woman, was pleased to find that one of the so-called monks at the Hermitage was a Frenchman who had been a hairdresser in London. She hoped to prolong her conversation with him, but she had to accompany her group to the crater. And she was not impressed. Like many other women, Piozzi found a way to deflect the force of the volcano—in her case, through a worldly wise attitude: "That the situation of the crater changed in this last eruption is of little consequence; it will change and change again I suppose. The wonder is, that nobody gets killed by venturing so near, while red-hot stones are flying about them so."²⁹

By contrast most male tourists actually hoped to witness an eruption firsthand and perhaps to absorb the power of the mountain. It was a means of self-fashioning, which of course had been one of the traditional purposes of the Grand Tour for generations of young gentlemen. Maximilien Misson, already in the late seventeenth century, observed male travelers who sought to enhance blasts by carrying gunpowder up to the crater, where they "dug mines to have the pleasure of blowing up bigger rocks."³⁰ John Moore reported that there were "young English gentlemen betting, who should venture farthest, or remain longest, near the mouth of the volcano."³¹ Proximity to the largest possible explosions of the volcano was clearly the lure. Johann Wolfgang von Goethe explained tourists' desire for proximity: "a present danger has something attractive about it and encourages people's spirit of contradiction to defy it."³² It offers an invigorating sense that one might be a match for nature's power, able to contend successfully with it hand to hand.

Goethe spoke the language of the sublime, long viewed as capable of enhancing a sense of self. In *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* Edmund Burke drew on (pseudo-) Longinus to point out that “[w]hatever . . . tends to raise a man in his own opinion, produces a sort of swelling and triumph that is extremely grateful to the human mind,” and this kind of self-consciousness is especially derived from the sublime experience, where “the mind always claim[s] to itself some part of the dignity and importance of the things which it contemplates.”³³ Burke gendered the sublime as masculine, identified by strength, depth, and extent; it possessed the power to invoke terror and concerned self-preservation. In contrast the beautiful, with smooth curves and soft colors, inspired love, reassured, concerned the social, and was viewed as feminine.³⁴ Burke influenced the writings of not only Goethe but also Kant, Schiller, Coleridge, and others, who posited that the sublime elevated the human soul through contact with the infinite. An individual observing nature or art would overcome the initial awe by identifying with the creative power that formed the object.³⁵ On one ascent Goethe timed the pauses between eruptions and ran to the edge of the crater planning to exit before the next blast. He lost count, however, and he and his guide, with stones flying about and noxious fumes choking them, nearly failed to clamber out.³⁶

The postrevolutionary period brought a heightened and more explicitly gendered rhetoric. For no one was the desire of proximity to the volcano greater than for Percy Shelley, who traveled to Naples with Mary Shelley and Clare Clairmont in 1818. Mary was depressed when she visited Naples, which explains why she did not say much about it in her journal or letters. The illness of Percy, she wrote, “[took] away from our gusto for this place.” However, Percy himself ignored his pain and reveled in the “impressive exhibition of the energies of nature.” To him, the hardened lava was “an actual image of the waves of the sea, changed into hard black stone by enchantment”; the summit showed “the most horrible chaos that can be imagined.” Only in conclusion did Percy admit that he felt terribly ill: “I should have enjoyed the scenery on my return, but that they conducted me, I know not how, to the hermitage in a state of intense bodily suffering.”³⁷ After pages of sensory wealth Percy spoke of his pain as though it were the expected concomitant of the tortured landscape he had just witnessed. Even his illness united him with the powerful mountain. As in his poem “Mont Blanc,” Percy’s experience was a sublime event in which, in tune with Kantian notions, natural energies came to elevate the poet’s status: “And what were thou, and earth,

and stars, and sea, / If to the human mind's imaginings / Silence and solitude were vacancy?" ("Mont Blanc," ll. 142–44).

The literary critic Marlon Ross suggests how mountains supplied sublime elevation to Romantic poets. Climbing, he notes, tests

the power and limits of self, it stresses the solitude of self-questing and pits the self against nature's power. The height of the mountain represents both the ever-spiraling ascent of imagination and the ever-present threat of falling, the loss of self-identity, the reabsorption into nature's overriding power. It is from mountains that prophets proclaim their truth; for the poet-prophet the mountain symbolizes the necessary solitude of the leaders of men and the necessary stance of truth—its transcendence, its elusiveness, and its immense might. It is another metaphor of masculine potency, which, through association, reinvests the poetic vocation with power and influence.³⁸

The identity conferred by the mountain is consistently masculine and, in the late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century travel accounts, bestowed upon a male subject. Consequently it makes sense to invoke the concept of a "masculine sublime" in this context.

By contrast Mary's reactions on the mountains they toured consistently differed from Percy's. Social events and social ideas emerged for Mary from the trip to Chamonix that inspired "Mont Blanc," whereas for Percy "the glaciers" represented forces of nature to be tapped by the solitary poet.³⁹ Writing about that trip, as Meena Alexander points out, Mary "consciously maintain[ed] the fabric of shared life" in her journal account: the Mer de Glace was not simply barren, frozen ice but was surrounded by vegetation, and she and Percy joined the substantial tour group ("beaucoup de monde") for a picnic. Moreover, in the Mer de Glace scene in *Frankenstein*, when Victor meets the monster, he is called upon to "Remember, that I am thy creature," that he has responsibility for the being he has placed on earth and cannot continue in his self-absorbed, removed state. Naples, despite the lack of enthusiasm expressed for it in Mary's journal and letters, became a significant location in her fiction. *The Last Man* begins there, with the narrator's visit to the cavern of the Cumaean Sibyl. There "Sibylline leaves" and pieces of bark, inscribed with verbal fragments, provide the material translated by the narrator to create a story of natural disaster and cultural devastation. Verney, the central figure, may be alone at the conclusion of the novel, but it is far from the artist's apotheosis Percy fantasizes; he wanders aim-

lessly around the ruins as Mary, depressed, must have paced Pompeii and Herculaneum. He visits libraries where poetical productions are rendered meaningless without readers. Mary Shelley's use of her travel experiences is, as in *Frankenstein*, utterly distinct from the ways her husband channeled those adventures.

Percy Shelley's view also differed from that of the naturalists. Marlon Ross has explained how, on the one hand, the Romantic poet identified with the quest of the scientist since he "searches for laws that he takes to be natural and universal, and, as inventor, he originates powerful ways of applying these laws to transform the material conditions of society." An emerging group of geologists followed William Hamilton and measured the volcano's crater after every blast in the hope of fathoming it, and many gentleman virtuosi carried along various instruments—thermometers, stopwatches, quadrants—to enhance their climb.⁴⁰ However, on the other hand, the poet wants more. While scientists are restricted "by the limitations of material cause and effect . . . the poet's power is limited only by his own capacity for self-possession. . . . To use Shelley's terms, to follow scientists instead of poets is to become enslaved to the material conditions that we want to control."⁴¹

Hester Lynch Piozzi's account demonstrated a concern about material conditions more akin to that of the scientist and lay naturalist; she displayed no interest in Percy Shelley's type of enchantment. Piozzi and the scientists shared a realistic assessment of the mountain's danger. But unlike scientists Piozzi questioned the extent to which human beings could prevail. What was the point of pursuing knowledge in the face of overwhelming destructive power? she asked. By pointing to the ever-changing nature of the mountain and the inevitable red-hot stones, Piozzi called into question the efficacy of scientific observations as a way of ultimately controlling a phenomenon that always had and always would threaten human life.⁴²

Other female travel-narrators, whether British or German, described more mundane attempts than Piozzi's to repel the impact of the uncontrollable mountain. Though expressing different levels of interest, they ultimately, literally or figuratively, also turned away from the chasm: Elisa von der Recke retreated, fighting the smoke.⁴³ Mariana Starke tersely recalled her ascent; in three sentences she rerouted attention from the volcano to proper supportive equipment: "a stout stick and a pair of boots" are what is needed to complete the climb, she points out.⁴⁴ For Lady Morgan redirecting attention from terror was fortuitously supplied by others. Expecting "a strong sensation . . . of meeting Nature, all

solitary and sublime” at the crater, she instead came across “a group of English dandies” who gossiped about last night’s party and allowed her easily to be distracted: “a sacrifice of the sublime to the agreeable!”⁴⁵ Friederike Brun purposely moved her attention away from the crater and attached it to the graves at the Hermitage. There she romantically indulged “noble thoughts of immortality” and of “the inseparability of moral beings,” the communication of souls. Vesuvius itself, she said, looked dead to her; not the dried lava but the life that forced its way through warranted attention: “What is moving is the timidly sprouting young plant life in the old lava masses.”⁴⁶ Again Staël’s fiction coincided with the factual accounts; she depicted Corinne, on Vesuvius, comparing the volcano negatively with other peaks and finding it decidedly unromantic: “By drawing us near to heaven, all other mountains seem to raise us above earthly life, but here I feel only anxiety and fear. . . . This is certainly not the abode of the righteous.”⁴⁷ Vesuvius represented only threat: physical, material, and untranscendent, and British and German female travel-narrators shared the aim of reinforcing this point for their readers.

This most common response of women—of redirecting their attention away from the mountain—implied an understanding that the mountain could not be vanquished or its energy tapped for the self in the way Percy Shelley and other male travelers desired. It was an object not to be instrumentalized but left to be what it was: a menacing feature of the landscape with which one had to come to terms. As Staël concluded of the erupting mountain, “nature has no longer any relationship with man. He can no longer believe himself to be the dominating power.”⁴⁸ Women’s responses explicitly evaded the sublime and transcendent, even as they called scientific mastery into question: we witness the transnational development of a particular, gendered epistemology.

Percy Shelley’s style of response is nonetheless often ascribed to a general Romantic drive to reenchant nature following the empirical emphasis of Enlightenment science. For instance, Chloe Chard has discussed Romantic travel overall as a way of satisfying “individual desires, demands, needs and impulses,” saying that this supplanted an earlier Enlightenment quest “for acquiring and ordering knowledge of the world” via “observation and comparison.”⁴⁹ But Vesuvius accounts complicate the story; they suggest that both qualities—satisfying individual impulses as well as ordering knowledge of the world—are simultaneously present. Moreover, they go beyond mere ideological or aesthetic concern to grapple with the material and physical experience of the climb,

with the volcano's flying red-hot stones, its rumbling and hissing noises, its choking, sulphurous emissions, its encroaching, flaming lava, all recalling the sensations of fiery conflict in a population that had experienced the period of Napoleon's military dictatorship, the slaughter and destruction, and the legacy of total war. They reveal a clash of values that has been described by Marshall Brown. Brown has pointed out that the terms "Romanticism" and "Enlightenment" are complex and shifting, and it is a mistake "to take Romantic values as the new and Enlightenment values as the old" when in fact we may be "dealing with a clash of contemporaneous values" that "need to be referred to their contemporary context in order to be understood."⁵⁰ Analysis of visits to Vesuvius, I suggest, offers an example of such a clash. Approaches to nature and power, to life and death, to war and military culture, are revealed in representations that on the one hand mythologize the mountain as a way for the narrator to incorporate its force and emerge victorious, or, on the other hand, to compartmentalize the destructive power of the volcano in an attempt to preserve human life and affections.

3. *Aesthetics and Desire*

Whereas pragmatic northern European female travel-narrators thus expressed and even urged a different view of Vesuvius, the predominant ideological and aesthetic habits of interpretation nonetheless loomed large. As I have suggested, most tourists' incorporation of the volcano's power occurred via the sublime, fueled by an overwhelming desire. Upon arrival in Naples many male tourists' first impulse was to scramble up to the crater and to tap the vigor of the erupting mountain for themselves: "The smoking peak of the volcano had beckoned to me; the desire to approach it defeated the exhaustion of a slow and uncomfortable trip from Rome," wrote Lorenz Meyer.⁵¹ The erotic aspect of the encounter, as Marlon Ross had suggested of mountains in general, was not lost on them: John Moore, who was on the Grand Tour as a tutor, mocked weak young men who did not pace themselves on the climb and arrived "panting and breathless at the top; like those young men who, having wasted their vigour in early excesses, and brought on premature old age, link themselves to some ill-fated woman, who drags them, tormenting and tormented, to the grave."⁵²

Johann Gottfried Seume, popular and radical author of the *Spaziergang nach Syrakus im Jahre 1802* (*A Walk to Syracuse in the Year 1802*),

frames his story of the Vesuvius ascent with female figures who offered an opportunity for a kind of consummation. Seume fortuitously met an Italian woman and her cousin, and they decided to climb together. At the point when they got off their mules “what was to be expected happened: the lady . . . could not proceed on foot and remained behind, and I was so ungallant as not to trouble myself about it.” Seume climbed farther despite the resistance of a tired porter, exploring the dormant crater despite the oppressive heat. As he describes the quick descent, the brisk slide down ash and sand, Seume comments on how he had sought water everywhere on the dry mountain; now, at the top of the vineyards as if by magic a charming, sweet young woman brings a full jug. Seume indicates that his sexual desire matched the need for a drink: “As thirsty as I was, the girl was nearly more welcome than the water: and if I were to stay here longer, I almost think I would often visit the volcano on precisely this path maybe without a guide.” In Seume’s next sentence the first lady, the tourist, appears with some *Lacrimae Christi* wine to refresh her cousin and Seume, but she is a disappointment by comparison with the young woman: “the water was preferable” as was the first “Hebe,” an allusion to the daughter of Zeus who was cupbearer to the gods—a reference that places him in appealing superhuman company. Seume is rewarded for his manly effort by the services of not one but two women, the younger of whom becomes an object of fantasy. Even though the older lady gives him the address of her lodgings when they part, he again says he does not have the time to bother with her. Instead, for the whole evening his mind returns to the top of the mountain, and he composes a poem about a violent eruption that fills the gulf with its fireflood. Such a terrifying poetic consummation has a relaxing effect: “With these fantasies I fell asleep peacefully.” Where there was no actual eruption Seume supplied his own in poetic form.⁵³

Seume’s narrative draws on an aesthetic recommended by fellow radical Georg Forster and promoted by Forster through translation of a travel narrative of Charles Jean-Baptiste Mercier Dupaty. Dupaty’s description is particularly notable because it was selected by Forster both for review in the *Göttingische Anzeigen von gelehrten Sachen* and for presentation in his group of translated travel narratives. Indeed, the importance of this text as an object of transfer would be hard to overestimate, as it helped inspire Forster’s own innovative and influential mode of travel description that was lauded by Alexander von Humboldt (see chapter 2). In the review, which appeared on 7 February 1789, Forster emphasizes the novelty of Dupaty’s account, which unlike previous travel descriptions does

not draw on chronicles and topographies, nor does it depict streets or buildings or meals or local dialects or governments. Instead, Forster says, the writer chooses to describe “what was striking to him, what interested his heart and his mind,” paying greater attention to “the relationship of his spirit to things than to the things themselves.”⁵⁴ Forster praises Dupaty’s ardent but also tender “understanding of the beauties of nature and art” and singles out his unusual description of Raphael’s painting, *Incendio del Borgo*, in which Dupaty pretends to be a part of the action of a city fire and only at the conclusion of the experience admits that it is not an actual occurrence but an involving pictorial representation. “No one before our author has possessed to this high degree the gift of making a picture of the description of a picture” (227–28). Forster likewise expresses admiration for “the philosophical penetration and right feeling” (227) of the author’s political observations. Though the text was to Forster an anonymous one, the author was rumored to be Dupaty, “the upright, passionate advocate, who uncovered the shortcomings of the French criminal justice system and saved three innocent men who were condemned to torture on the wheel” (229).⁵⁵ Two months later, in the preface to his German translation of Dupaty’s work, dated 23 April 1789 and less than three months before the storming of the Bastille, Forster heightens Dupaty’s political importance. Not only is he “the most vociferous opponent to the shortcomings and horrors of the French penal laws,” but he has also contributed “to the great ferment in his nation,” by means of which “an enlightened people should also become a free people.”⁵⁶

As a result of Dupaty’s influence, Forster’s own travel writing combined political and artistic observation, social and aesthetic aims. In 1790, the year following the review and translation of Dupaty, Forster set out with young Alexander von Humboldt on a trip through Holland and Belgium and England, and they returned to Germany via Paris, where they witnessed preparations for the first anniversary celebrations of Bastille Day. Forster’s book about that trip, titled *Ansichten vom Niederrhein (Views of the Lower Rhine)*, was praised for its innovative tone; it was, according to Thomas Saine, “of great influence in the history of describing art works and as a model of what a modern travel book could become.”⁵⁷ In other words, it innovated in precisely those ways Forster commended in Dupaty. Concerning the contemplation of works of art Forster says in *Ansichten*: “In my opinion one accomplishes one’s goal better by telling what one felt and thought in the presence of a work of art, that is, how it affected one, and what kind of effect it had, than by

describing it at length. . . . Through this reproduction of feelings we can get an inkling—not of how the work of art was really constituted—but at any rate, of how rich or poor it had to be in order to give expression to one force or another.”⁵⁸ Forster adopted Dupaty’s method to the letter. Though Forster did not specifically discuss Dupaty’s Vesuvius description in his review of the book, he justified the omission by saying that he would not spoil readers’ pleasure by divulging the contents of the visit to Naples and the ascent of the volcano; moreover, “this is why these entertaining letters are worth a translation,”⁵⁹ something he himself then provided within two months. Forster thus whetted readers’ appetites for a book he knew he would soon offer for sale. And given Dupaty’s strong influence on Forster, his book could well have spurred Forster’s prolific use of the volcano metaphor, quoted at the outset of the chapter, as it occurs in Forster’s discussions of the inevitability and desirability of political renewal.⁶⁰

Dupaty’s *Lettres sur L’Italie* was also translated into English in the revolutionary year, 1789, within a year after it appeared in French. Dupaty, like Seume, conveys the desire inspired by his experience. Based on travel from 1785, the narrative moves in a sexualized arc through the phases of increasing stimulation, creative eruption, and denouement. The volcano grants (pro)creative powers that allow Dupaty to beget both literary and physical progeny: “I have traced these few lines on the top of Mount Vesuvius, by the light of its eruption. I have in a certain manner struck a medal to attest my journey; to recal one day to the mind of such of my children as may one day wish to be present at this wonderful conflagration, this epoch of their father’s life.”⁶¹ Because of Vesuvius Dupaty can mint his coin, create a self that, anticipating the ambition of Mary Shelley’s Victor Frankenstein, will garner the veneration of coming generations.⁶² Like female travelers, and unlike other male ones, Dupaty mentions his children, but they are not so much flesh-and-blood dependents as phantom children whose future adulation promises his own immortality and glory. The isolated hero of the scene (though in reality he did not travel alone), Dupaty impresses upon the reader the simultaneous terror and thrill through repeated exclamations that form the climax of his account: “Behold me at length arrived at the crater. . . . The fiery gulph begins to growl within.—Hark! How dreadful and horrid the crash!—Behold that immense whirlwind of flames striking across that thick shower of blazing ashes!—Millions of sparks ascend into the air—millions of stones, distinguished by their black colour, are hissing, falling, rolling, and falling again” (II:149). “Quite in extasy,” he does not

want to come down from the heights but would prefer to remain with his fiery mistress: "I could have wished to pass the night near such a conflagration . . . but the wind, that blew very cold, had already frozen my limbs; I descended, but alas! with what regret!" (II:151). Dupaty comes down and makes a plea for his progeny, the conduits of his immortality: "Farewell again thou ignivomous mountain. . . . If it is written above, that thou art to bury under thy ashes those palaces, those villages, or that city, oh! let it not happen when my children are there!" (II:151).

If male travelers reveled in the sublime and used it to experience and depict both personal and political enhancement, female travelers tended to emphasize the picturesque. Anna Jameson, who was as thrilled as any of the men with her climb of Vesuvius, ultimately interpreted it via the picturesque in her *Diary of an Ennuyée* (1826), published in the same year as Hemans's "Casabianca" and Shelley's *The Last Man*, and inspired by Staël's *Corinne*.⁶³ Like Dupaty, she undertook a thrilling nocturnal ascent of Vesuvius; like Dupaty, she was nearly hit by flying fiery stones. But, as with Dupaty, her account became self-consciously gendered. The men in Jameson's party greeted the eruptions with exclamations, as did Dupaty: "As we approached, the explosions became more and more vivid, and at every tremendous burst of fire our friend L** jumped half off his seat, making most loud and characteristic exclamations,—'By Jove! a magnificent fellow! now for it, whizz! there he goes, sky high, by George!' The rest of the party were equally enthusiastic in a different style; and I sat silent and quiet from absolute inability to express what I felt" (IV:143). In contrast to Dupaty, for whom the sublimity of the experience initially brought on ecstatic, participatory exclamations but ultimately rendered him silent after the descent, Jameson's initial muteness turned into speech once she had returned to the desk at her hotel: "I am not in a humour to describe, or give way to any poetical flights, but I must endeavour to give a faithful, sober, and circumstantial account of our last night's expedition, while the impression is yet fresh on my mind" (IV:142). Even though she finds the work difficult, struggling with the sublimity of it—"the whole scene around us, in its romantic interest and terrible magnificence, mocked all power of description" (IV:146)—she nonetheless overcomes the hurdle by seeing the vista "with a painter's eye."

Jameson invokes the discourse of the picturesque, I would argue, as a way of framing and thereby gaining a measure of control over the landscape. She seeks critical distance in order to offer a realistic, "faithful, sober, and circumstantial account," and at the same time struggles to find her place in the event. In evaluating the scene, she does not participate

in a (pro)creative and self-immortalizing happening, but incorporates desire differently; she views the scene from the outside, as an observer (as well as appreciator) of masculine absorption, a quality supplied by soldiers gathered around the crater: “Great numbers of the Austrian forces, now occupying Naples, were on the mountains, assembled in groups, some standing, some sitting, some stretched on the ground and wrapped in their cloaks, in various attitudes of amazement and admiration: and as the shadowy glare fell on their tall martial figures and glittering accoutrements, I thought I had never beheld any thing so wildly picturesque” (IV:147). As had many travelers, Jameson had absorbed the work of William Gilpin, the English writer who did the most to popularize picturesque landscape aesthetics. Although Gilpin generally viewed human figures as mere “appendages” to a landscape, nonetheless special characters could “further some idea of greatness, wildness, or ferocity.”⁶⁴ Among these are soldiers, but, as Gilpin insists, they must be dressed for the part: “not in modern regimentals; but as Virgil paints them,—*longis adnixa hastis, et scuta tenentes*” (leaning on long spears and holding shields), figures who, like gypsies and banditti, “add a deeper tinge to the character of the scene.”⁶⁵ Jameson’s “cloaks” and “glittering accoutrements” supply the antique effect Gilpin requires. Jameson is as thrilled as Dupaty by her experience, but her gaze shifts away from the crater to the attractive viewers of the crater. Like the other women she diverts her attention. Gender would appear to position Jameson differently vis-à-vis the sublime terror of the volcano. Importantly, her account pacifies military culture, with lounging soldiers as aesthetic objects who add color to the scene. In the framed artistry of the picturesque, then, she is able to make sense of her experience and to communicate priorities. In chapter 4 we will see how she goes further and uses military uniforms not only to distance and objectify soldiers but also to critique their modern mechanistic slaughter in comparison with what she sees as the bloody but naturally motivated raiding of Native American warriors.

British and German women travelers thus shared a response emanating from a socially constructed gender position that drew attention to the similarities within their class. Indeed, transnational continuities of women’s lives in general during the early modern period have been outlined by Olwen Hufton, whose overview of western European women’s history shows how their lived experience, their practical, everyday reality, was more differentiated by class than by nation. Wealthy women in Britain and Germany (as well as France), and especially those literate ones writing travel accounts, had more in common with each other

than they had with their servants.⁶⁶ Female travelers of similar privileged backgrounds, when faced with the enormity and violence of Vesuvius, drew on a substantially shared ethical, religious, physical, educational, literary, and sentimental repertoire. They lived under similar legal and social disadvantages. Their responses to the mountain remind us that many of them were brought up with limited exercise, so they became exhausted when they climbed; some stopped partway. Their clothing was often pulled tight, so they could not breathe in the sulphurous smoke. The vogue of sentimentalism in the late eighteenth century, especially among their class, and for most, a shared Christian ethos whether Protestant or Catholic, encouraged dwelling on themes of death and fear and elicited sympathy for those killed by the volcano. Since they did not set out to create a cabinet of curiosities, they usually did not collect samples of lava as many men did.⁶⁷ Women with the energy and curiosity to climb Vesuvius were confident, strong, and unafraid of being viewed as “unfeminine.” And in the new culture of total war, where such strong-willed women were made peripheral to the military-political regime, they felt everything from ennui to anger. The conflicted position of women vis-à-vis the volcano remained beyond the Napoleonic period. In revolutionary 1848, French satirical cartoons featured “Les Vésuviennes,” female warriors who, though alluringly dressed in military clothing, carrying guns, and smoking, were ultimately more concerned about their hair and makeup. According to Laura Struminger, “The rhetoric of the Vésuvienne brought revolutionary ideas to male-female relations while keeping them at a safe distance from the realities of the bloody barricades”; the image was “both a conserver of the *status quo* and a spur to action.”⁶⁸ Thus the volcano, decades later, continued to retain its strongly gendered associations. Confronting this mountain presented an occasion wherein cultural definitions of masculinity and femininity were formed or reinforced.

Women may have sensed this and decided it was likely to work to their disadvantage. In the prerevolutionary context, the mountain represented the loss and destruction of natural catastrophe. Therefore even before the early-nineteenth-century era of Napoleonic clashes, a confrontation with a mountain of sublime, fiery conflict might be approached with ambivalence, since women lacked sufficient protection on both material and symbolic levels. The mountain could mean very real disaster. In the introduction to her edited volume *Gender and Catastrophe*, Ronit Lentin points out that while one cannot essentialize women as “a unitary victim group” of disasters, women are nonetheless, because of their cultural

location, affected differently than men by catastrophes, and that “for the gendering of catastrophes not triggered by political military manoeuvres, such as famines and ‘natural’ disasters, which cannot be simplistically linked to the construction of gender in society [as she argues is the case in military interventions], we must look at the targeting of women as mothers, unpaid domestic labourers, chattels, sexual objects, repositories of family and national honour and the symbolic representational trope of the nation.”⁶⁹ The function of “femininity” even in the face of natural rather than human-made disaster can consist in underscoring representations of females that work counter to the interests of actual women. Margaret Kelleher, for example, has shown how women became the figure for the mid-nineteenth-century Irish famine, and that those images of dry-breasted or dead mothers, while giving expression to the “unspeakable,” could serve to hide the sociopolitical catalysts and meanings of the disaster; “the affective response thus generated” could lead to “passivity and fatalism which works against real understanding.”⁷⁰ Women could help the culture to represent horror, then, but those images could draw attention away from structural problems and inequalities that exacerbated disaster and required reform.

My sense is that prerevolutionary eighteenth-century women understood the sexual politics of disaster: the repercussions of a Vesuvian eruption likely, disproportionately, and on many levels would affect women and those for whom they were responsible, and female travelers therefore viewed the mountain with hesitation or impatience. They sensed the ideological implications of their fear. They respected the emerging scientific wish for empirical evaluations of natural phenomena insofar as they desired a down-to-earth assessment of the dangers and human costs of catastrophe. Their aim to deflect power implied both recognition of a larger force and the belief that they could attempt to live alongside it even if it could not be incorporated via the sublime. Female authors sought to evade the physical enormity and threat of the volcano and viewed it instead as a feature of the landscape that complicated the meaning of quotidian existence, whether this had to do with physical needs or metaphysical insights.

Eighteenth-century women also implicitly asked: Why glorify catastrophe when there is enough chaos and pain in the world? What male travelers valued as extraordinary in Vesuvius, women tended to view as part of life’s eternal landscape. Their accounts suggest they were unconvinced that people would necessarily prevail. Reports of another prerevolutionary disaster, the Calabria earthquake of 1783, underscore this

point succinctly. The Princesse de Gonzague judged that disaster “a terrible example of the instability of human affairs” and she reproached the philosophes for believing they could master nature: “What would become of their philosophical chatter, watching the earth tremble, the cities disappear!”⁷¹ Hester Lynch Piozzi met a woman who was lamenting the loss of a fifteen-year-old son. He had rescued her but was then apparently crushed by crowds or falling debris. Asked whether she would take up the king’s offer of premiums to resettle in Calabria, the woman replies, “No, no; that’s a curst place; I lost my son in it. *Never, never* will I see it more!”⁷² Moved by the story, Piozzi empathizes with the woman’s grief and understands her refusal to return. She dwells on her own emotional response, on the tears welling up in her eyes and on the need to move away to another part of the room to compose herself. In doing so Piozzi deploys the rhetoric of sentimental narrative to raise a very practical question: Why put one’s self at the mercy of trauma-inducing forces?

Lorenz Meyer, by contrast, uses a woman’s response to the Calabria earthquake to come to a very different conclusion about virtue in distress. Instead of the female authors’ skeptical stance he invokes sublime terror with the aim of reinforcing notions of masculine heroism and conduct-book femininity. Meyer tells of “a young pretty wife” who, nine months pregnant, is buried under her house for thirty hours when her husband, expecting a corpse, dramatically digs her out alive. When asked what she was thinking during those hours, she responds, “*I waited*.” Meyer might have wondered why the young wife did not pray, fear for loved ones, or find reconciliation to God’s will, but instead he concludes: “Need one comment on this most beautiful panegyric to feminine character?” To Meyer, waiting represents the height of feminine virtue. Passivity in the face of fear is even more praiseworthy, apparently, than the wife’s successfully giving birth just hours after her rescue.⁷³ The moment of masculine sublimity creates the hero—the rescuing husband desperately digging through the ravaged landscape—with the wife as waiting recipient. Meyer underscores the period’s sexual politics of disaster, where the social construction of gender is reinforced to the disadvantage of actual women.

Lest this analysis of gender and disaster appear unrepresentative, I offer a more recent example to convey the urgency felt by a twenty-first century Iranian woman about such an antifeminist process: it offers striking parallels to eighteenth-century European women’s views of revolution and disaster. A report by Roger Cohen from Tehran during mass demonstrations protesting the 2009 election loss of Iranian reform candidate Mir Hossein Mousavi takes up the very same subject.

I asked one woman about her fears. She said sometimes she imagines an earthquake in Tehran. She dashes out but forgets her hijab. She stands in the ruins, hair loose and paralyzed, awaiting her punishment. And she looked at me wide-eyed as if to say: do you understand, does the world understand our desperation?⁷⁴

This woman's response to the current unrest in Iran, as reported by Cohen, reveals the same understanding of gender and disaster displayed by eighteenth-century European women. Fear is the emotion that leads the woman to an explication of her double bind, to an apprehension of the impossible situation in which she lives: even if she can manage to save herself from natural disaster, a patriarchal cultural code may well do her in. The requirement to wear the hijab and all it represents will not be lifted even under extraordinary circumstances. Notwithstanding an exhilarating movement for reform and a time of calls for greater social freedom, the very real possibility exists that oppressive patriarchal ways will be reinforced rather than eliminated. In this case the earthquake, the disaster, becomes a metaphor for social upheaval. And though a popular uprising, a political earthquake, is a quickening event that can bring the woman outdoors with hair loose, apparently finally free, she may simply end up standing in ruins, unable to move. In her imagination, then, a popular earthquake may not lead directly to liberation: the ruins may signify not the pulverization of a repressive regime but the loss of civilization, the rise of a new rigidity and another occasion for subjection. The constellation of concerns and perceptions of this Iranian woman, viewing her position in patriarchal culture through the lens of disaster, significantly resembles the analysis of European women at the end of the eighteenth and beginning of the nineteenth centuries. We obviously cannot *equate* the day-to-day experiences of a twenty-first-century Iranian woman with Enlightenment northern European women, especially via an account interpreted by an American reporter; however, we can *compare* them: the epistemologies revealed to make sense of their experiences in patriarchy, encompassing fear, critical perception, and an awareness of the ideological stakes of upheaval, do resemble each other and suggest recognition and a critique of symbolic patterns that reinforce the social construction of gender.

It helps to clarify why European female travel writers of the late eighteenth century felt inclined to turn away from sublime self-fashioning as well as from the other side of that coin, the passivity it implied for women. Male visitors to Vesuvius tended not to concern themselves

with the consequences of a potentially catastrophic eruption; they commonly delighted in the mountain, focused on observations and self-enhancement, and enjoyed the emotional charge that an experience of the volcano could supply. Even more so in a postrevolutionary, militarized era could male and female visitors register distinct reactions or else be forced to interpret an atypical response as unsuited to the requirements of their gender.

Such difference accounts, then, for the distinct epistemology evinced by Jameson's response to the volcano. Jameson's use of the picturesque in her Vesuvius description reveals a hybrid approach, what I would like to call "critical apprehension." She drew on a social aspect of the picturesque, explained by David Marshall as a "double consciousness." By viewing a scene "with a painter's eye," Jameson, according to Marshall, "identifies with another beholder, experiences someone else's point of view, mediates [her] perception of the landscape through a double perspective that is divided between a sight and someone else's view of it."⁷⁵ Unlike the usual male travel-narrator, who depicted his sublime experience with the volcano as utterly solitary, Jameson both acknowledges the participation of others in the event and uses the picturesque to ensure recognition for and understanding of her interpretation of the brilliant soldiers. Picturesque aesthetics allows her simultaneously to deflect the threatening physical and symbolic force of the erupting mountain while offering a way of expressing need and emotional investments. Jameson's aesthetic corresponds with what some feminist critics have called the "feminine sublime" that favors the social, rejecting masculine sublime isolation and instead forging links. The "feminine sublime" helps to explain the strong gendering of aesthetic categories, and this buttresses the nonessentialist historical and sociopolitical arguments I wish to make.⁷⁶ Women understood the sublime,⁷⁷ but in narrating the Italian volcano they consciously deployed a different epistemological category, one that simultaneously embraced apprehension, emotion, and pragmatism. Their "critical apprehension" informs Piozzi's 1789 account, Staël's 1807 *Corinne, or Italy*, as well as Jameson's 1826 *Diary of an Ennuyée*.

4. Art and Archaeology

The artistic record offers more evidence of this lasting approach. A comparison of Angelika Kauffmann's *Pliny the Younger and his Mother at Misenum* (1785)—which represents one of the very few images of a blast-

ing Vesuvius painted by a woman for public display—with renderings of “Eruptions of Vesuvius” by Michael Wutky, Joseph Wright of Derby, Jakob Philipp Hackert, and others, demonstrates this with particular clarity.⁷⁸ Wutky’s depiction of the 1779 eruption, for example, was painted a half a decade before Kauffmann’s, but in contrast to Kauffmann’s neoclassicism, his picture demonstrates the Romantic sublime at its most dramatic (figure 4). Small human figures in poses of amazement stand at the lip of the crater, dwarfed by a mountain that is shooting out bright orange-red lava, lighting up the black of the night. Such popular landscape paintings continue to do well at auction and enjoy top billing in exhibit catalogs and on posters. In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century they catered to the popular interest in emerging scientific study of volcanoes even as they thrilled viewers with special lighting effects.⁷⁹ Indeed, Wutky (Austrian), Wright of Derby (British) and Hackert (German) belonged to an extensive international group of male artists painting such dramatic Vesuvius scenes, which included also the Dane Johan Christian Clausen Dahl, the Frenchmen Pierre Jacques Volaire, Charles François Lacroix de Marseille, and Pierre-Henri de Valenciennes, and the British artist J. M. W. Turner.⁸⁰

The contrast between Kaufmann and the male painters of the sublime reinforces Marshall Brown’s notion of dialectics within the Enlightenment and Romanticism, for Kauffmann compartmentalizes and frames the volcano no less than Jameson or Piozzi, both through the architectural setting and the theme itself (figure 5). She uses a historical subject to gain temporal perspective and to redefine heroism. As Wendy Was-syng Roworth reminds us, history painting “represented heroic or tragic human actions through narratives” based on history and literature, with the goal of providing “moral instruction through the representation of uplifting scenes of noble deeds.”⁸¹ This was precisely Felicia Hemans’s aim in “Casabianca” and “The Image in Lava.” Here it is the seated pair—mother and son—who convey heroism, “stille Grösse” in Johann Joachim Winckelmann’s terms, in the face of tragedy. Indeed the mother, not the mountain, is at the center, and the picture’s emotion is not terror. Although women in the background certainly express distress, the picture focuses on the proximity of the son to his mother and his sense of responsibility to his uncle’s fame and posterity—he studies historiography, takes extracts from Livy—conveying the method by which he will inscribe himself and his uncle into the annals of history through his letters to Tacitus.⁸² Kauffmann represents words, gestures, and even writing. Characters speak to each other, both in the foreground and mid-



FIG. 4. Michael Wutky, *The Summit of Vesuvius Erupting* (1779). Courtesy of the Akademie der Bildenden Künste, Vienna, Austria.

dle ground. Young Pliny, at his mother's side, links the characters of the painting, future readers of his historiography, and the viewer (modeled by the response of the male figure at the right) into a community, who recognize the vehemence and threat of the eruption, but who privilege the claim of future generations.

One can productively contrast Valenciennes's dramatic depiction of Pliny's death, where the historical subject merely serves to complete a representation of total devastation: nature overwhelms culture as the collapsing buildings and the small, unindividuated dying man in the foreground succumb to the power of the mountain spewing lava and ash from the background (figure 6). No didactic or redeeming message is conveyed but, as with Wutky, the goal remains overpowering sublime effects. Though Kauffmann's representation may differ from the more common men's Vesuvius representations in terms of genre (historical painting versus landscape), style (neoclassical versus Romantic), and perhaps market (academic versus popular), the combination of subject, aesthetic orientation, and theme still reinforces the implications I



FIG. 5. Angelika Kauffmann, *Pliny the Younger with His Mother at Misenum* (1785). Princeton University Art Museum / Art Resource, NY.

have been describing concerning gender in the travel literature. Women writers, as was Kauffmann, were not oblivious to the sublime; they were intrigued by it. But when it came to recording their own perceptions, they privileged a distancing, framing rhetoric because it better suited their priorities.

It is not that women lacked interest in the volcano or even in the representations of artists such as Wutky and his colleagues; indeed, they held strong opinions about the ways the mountain ought to be represented. Piozzi above all wanted a realistic depiction of the volcano, something for which she praises Voltaire, famous among Vesuvius painters, because he represents Vesuvius without “that black shadow” (II:5) artificially employed by so many others as a contrast to the flames. Like Anna Jameson, Piozzi wants to take in the wildness of the scene—she recognizes its sublimity—but this does not mean a need for exaggeration or overdramatization of elements through mythologizing and self-



FIG. 6. Pierre-Henri de Valenciennes, *Eruption of Vesuvius on the 24th of August 79* (1813). Valenciennes depicts the death of Pliny the Elder in the foreground, as it was described in the letter of Pliny the Younger. Toulouse, Musée des Augustins, photograph by Daniel Martin.

aggrandizement. The point is precisely not to heighten the mystery of the mountain but to represent it in ways that readily expose its menacing relevance. In this respect, then, Kauffmann's seemingly restrained neoclassical picture models a characteristic female traveler's response, despite its academic and historical focus, since it suggests that the proper way to look at this phenomenon is by incorporating it within a human story. Kauffmann's representation does not avoid the fact of death—it alludes to that of Pliny the Elder—but it does seek to express the social meaning and consequences of his demise, and it insists above all on the centrality of women and human communication.⁸³ To this extent it represents what the women might well have considered a more “realistic” picture than those wild, lava-dominated ones painted by the men who ostensibly portray the volcano “as it was.”

The gendered difference in response to the effects of Vesuvius before the 1830s is evident not only in representations of the mountain itself

but also in apparently less spectacular responses to the archaeological findings at Pompeii and Herculaneum. These cities were destroyed in the year 79; archaeological digs began in earnest in 1738 and 1748. During the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries the outdoor theaters were the primary, unearthened sites for tourists to visit. Again, the commonest focus for male visitors was self-fashioning. At the theater in Pompeii, Percy Shelley praised the greatness of ancient poets and marveled at how they benefited from performances in open-air settings. Winckelmann focused on the dimensions and purposes of the theater's architecture, while unsentimental Goethe could not help but admit the intellectual pleasure derived from witnessing ancient scenes of death: "Much evil has happened in the world, but little that would have given descendants so much joy. I cannot easily conceive of anything more interesting."⁸⁴ More emphatically, Lorenz Meyer, though he also admits to being moved by the fate of the unlucky inhabitants, muses that Pompeii and Herculaneum were actually meant to be buried so that enlightened scientists could get the most out of their excavation. The cities were "preserved for the rediscovery of a century that knew how to draw advantages from this important discovery, which the centuries of ignorance would have scorned. In this way the world gained ten-fold compensation for the devastation of a small strip of land by the firefloods of Vesuvius."⁸⁵ Like Goethe he relishes the paradox that loss brings gain; moreover, the destruction is justified because of the advantages to be gleaned from it by modern historians. Perhaps the definitive nine-volume *Voyage d'un François en Italie, fait dans les Années 1765 & 1766*, compiled by Jérôme Lalande, had inspired such a view: "this lava of Vesuvius was a happy defender against the ravages of time and the plundering of the barbarians."⁸⁶

Most female travelers, not interested in finding ways of recasting a destructive mountain as the paradoxical preserver of civilization, were above all motivated by themes of loss and pain. Visiting the theater at Herculaneum, Hester Piozzi reflected on "the scene of gaiety and pleasure, overwhelmed by torrents of liquid fire! . . . such a scene may be all acted over again to-morrow; and . . . we, who to-day are spectators, may become spectacles to travelers of a succeeding century."⁸⁷ Piozzi's experience inclined her to ponder the situational irony that could emerge if the volcano erupted during her own tour of Naples. She thus invoked simultaneously critical distance (ironic detachment), emotional proximity (empathy), the social ("we"), and an extended time frame that was not simply a past leading up to the triumphant, "happy" present, as in Meyer's and Lalande's accounts, but that imagined the future as well

(“travelers of a succeeding century”). Although Dupaty had acknowledged the possibility of a further eruption killing human beings, he could not imagine *himself* dying; instead it was his progeny he cried out for, the carriers of his name and fame: “If . . . thou art to bury under thy ashes those palaces, those villages, or that city, oh! let it not happen when my children are there!” (II:151).⁸⁸

Piozzi, by contrast, viewed from the position of victim and invoked space and time accordingly, with critical apprehension. And this was no less true of Kauffmann’s painting despite its ancient subject, as it shifted in perspective between human foreground and natural background and privileged the activity of young Pliny, who would tell the story of the eruption and Pliny the Elder’s death to people far away and to future generations. Even Anna Jameson thematized her own struggle to interpret her experience by recording how she sought distance, reflected, and wrote out her narrative at her hotel.

While the antitriumphalist view is prevalent in the work of Piozzi and Kauffmann before the Revolution, late Romantic women are particularly effusive on this score because, as I have argued, the Napoleonic wars foregrounded themes of death, militarism, and catastrophic threats to civilization. Mary Shelley’s *The Last Man* (1826), as I have suggested, illustrates the focus on loss emphatically, as does Felicia Hemans’s poem “The Image in Lava.” All these works convey the extent to which catastrophe and gender are mutually implicated in a context of violent clashes, whether natural or human-made. Like the nonfiction travel writers they exhibit critical apprehension, an epistemology characteristic of women’s accounts that acknowledges not only their fear—their apprehension—but also a double understanding on their part: a perception about coping with fear as well as an understanding of the ideological ramifications of that emotion. Vesuvius represented a limit, nature in its most destructive form, and Napoleon offered a human counterpart.

* * *

The travel literature I have analyzed suggests that Naples, though often characterized by the phrase “dolce far niente” (sweet idleness), was not uniformly the effeminizing place, or at least effeminizing in the manner that late-eighteenth-century critics of the Grand Tour claimed it to be. The warm south may have offered northern European travelers the chance to relax, but the majority of men’s writings suggests that visits to Vesuvius, far from depleting energies, renewed them; in this sense the



FIG. 7. Auguste Desperret, *Troisième éruption du volcan de 1789*, from *La Caricature* 135 (1833), Planche no. 29. Huntington Library, San Marino, California.

volcano bolstered virility and thereby facilitated the traditional purpose of the Grand Tour, that of creating masculine leaders to set the tone for their generation and to supply warriors for armed conflict. Women, as newer partakers of the Tour, appear to have been ignored in this regard, assumed not to be threatened by southern sources of emasculation and unlikely to benefit from the volcano's charge.

The use of Vesuvius as symbol did not end with the Congress of Vienna or the exile or death of Napoleon. In an arresting cartoon image of 1833, Vesuvius was employed to champion an explosive "Liberty" that erupts from the revolution-volcano (figure 7). Oddly, the lava moves selectively, past the settlement representing France but gobbling up the monarchies whose flags dot the sides of the mountain, and the only peo-

ple threatened appear to be the monarchs' soldiers—surprisingly there are no civilians, no women, no children. The culture of total war has succeeded in separating masculine militarism from the quotidian concerns of common life. The soldiers flee past the only ruined edifice, a foreground structure that was damaged by a previous eruption. That earlier blast had toppled the building stones of “divine right” that a viewer sees scattered over the landscape. Such an expression of excitement at the volcanic explosion combined with the fantasy of selective, limited destruction that will result in life-giving effects reveals a lasting trace of revolutionary and late Romantic belief in Vesuvius's sublime rewards.

In the revolutionary and Napoleonic era, women's travel accounts tended to reject the myth of the mountain; many insisted on a realistic view of the very substantial threat that this natural phenomenon could pose to human beings. Their accounts of journeys to Naples revealed an approach, critical apprehension, that challenged the sublime. Having witnessed the volcano and its crater, having seen the destroyed cities of Pompeii and Herculaneum, women writers tended to prefer a long view via the picturesque. Napoleon's imperial battles elicited a revulsion not only to the violence and death of combat but also to the constructions of gender initiated by the new system of total war. A threatening Vesuvius on evocative classical ground therefore inspired travel narrators of that era to either critique or confirm distinct gender roles, to reinforce or oppose the masculinized culture of war instigated by the French Revolution and Napoleon's rule. Vulcanism became a trope in political language and war itself a naturalized, looming presence in the landscape of Europe.