AESTHETIC EXPERIENCE, INVESTIGATION AND CLASSIC GROUND: RESPONSES TO ETNA FROM THE FIRST CENTURY CE TO 1773*

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In 1773, a previously unpublished Scottish author, Patrick Brydone (1736–1818) released a two-volume travel account which would become one of the runaway hits of the Enlightenment. The best-known scenes of the *Tour through Sicily and Malta* describe Brydone's visit to and ascent up Mount Etna, the active strato-volcano whose smoking profile dominates the east coast of Sicily.[1] As he sought to put into words everything Etna meant and represented, Brydone drew on three distinct categories of thought: the scientific, the aesthetic, and the cultural. He carried his barometer up the volcano to measure it; he was overwhelmed with awe on viewing the sunrise from its summit; and he carefully set his account in the context of different mythological and philosophical explanations of Etna, largely drawn from the writings of classical authors.[2]

Brydone's account of Etna can be—and has been—taken as typifying the modern, Enlightenment context in which he wrote in several key ways. His desire to provide empirical observations of Etna and to understand the causes of its phenomena can, certainly, be seen as symptomatic of the rise of experimental science, while his aesthetic response seems to be rooted in the eighteenth-century concept of the natural sublime.[3] Moreover, Brydone's focus on the ancient history of the volcano can persuasively be read as representing his experience of 'classic

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1. Patrick Brydone, *A Tour through Sicily and Malta: In a Series of Letters to William Beckford, esq. of Somerly in Suffolk*, 2 vols, London 1773; for a detailed analysis see C. Duffy, *The Landscapes of the Sublime, 1700–1830: Classic Ground*, Basingstoke 2013, pp. 68–86. On Brydone see K. Turner, 'Brydone, Patrick (1736–1818), Traveller and Author', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (available online), 2017; R. B. Sher, *The Enlightenment and the Book: Scottish Authors and Their Publishers in Eighteenth-Century Britain, Ireland, and America*, Chicago and London 2006, pp. 92, 346 and 454. See also J. Evans, *A Quite Remarkable Man: The Life of Patrick Brydone and His Family, 1736–1818*, Stroud 2014.

2. Brydone (as in n. 1), I, pp. 183, 245–51.

3. J. Farrell, '"A Reverend Pilgrim": Patrick Brydone in Sicily', in *Sicily and Scotland: Where Extremes Meet*, ed. G. Tulloch et al., Leicester 2014, pp. 72–83, particularly emphasises the connection between Brydone's perspectives as a traveller and his Scottish Enlightenment context (pp. 79–81) and argues that he displayed 'a new, Romantic sensibility' in his descriptions of nature (pp. 82–83). See also M. D'Amore, *The Royal Society and the Discovery of the Two Sicilies: Southern Routes in the Grand Tour*, Cham 2017, pp. 159–63. B. Colbert, 'Contemporary Notice of the Shelleys' "History of a Six Weeks' Tour": Two New Early Reviews', *Keats-Shelley Journal*, XLVIII, 1999, pp. 22–29 (26–27), notes Brydone's 'neat leap from the scientific to the sublime' and sets his passages on the sublime sunrise from the summit of Etna alongside other classic accounts of the natural sublime.

ground'—that is, of Etna as a landscape imbued with historic and cultural associations. As Cian Duffy has argued, this became 'a key paradigm of the encounter with the "natural sublime" during the eighteenth century and Romantic period'.[4]

These identifications of Brydone's apparent modernity are of a piece with wider narratives of changing attitudes towards nature and the landscape from the pre-modern to the modern era. Many prominent and influential works of scholarship, across numerous disciplines, have asserted that the eighteenth century saw a shift from a feeling of distaste for nature, particularly mountains, to a response of enjoyment and appreciation.[5] The earlier sensations are assumed to have held sway from the classical era to the end of the seventeenth century, with the modern-day European appreciation of nature marking a sharp contrast to the negative view of previous eras. The eighteenth-century development of the 'natural sublime' is often identified as both a driver and a symptom of this shift.

The standard narrative acknowledges that the concept of the sublime had its origins in the rhetorical writings of a first-century AD author now known as Pseudo-Longinus, but holds that it did not come to be associated with nature until the eighteenth century. Two English writers, Joseph Addison (1672–1719) and John Dennis (1658–1734) have been credited with inaugurating the tradition of adopting the language of the sublime to articulate their responses to grand objects which evoked complex and overwhelming sensations of pleasurable fear, awe and wonder. Thereafter, the notion of the sublime came to be increasingly employed in descriptions of nature—particularly grand nature, such as mountains and volcanoes.[6] Philosophers, prominently including Edmund Burke (1729/30–1797) and Immanuel Kant (1724–1804), then took up the idea of the sublime, theorising it as a form of aesthetic response and deliberately distinguishing it from responses prompted by 'the beautiful'.[7] The further, specifically Kantian, idea of

4. Duffy (as in n. 1), p. 9; he draws the term from Joseph Addison's 'Letter from Italy' (1701), ll. 11–12, 'Poetic fields encompass me around, / And still I seem to tread on classic ground'.

5. See, most famously, M. H. Nicolson, *Mountain Gloom and Mountain Glory: The Development of the Aesthetics of the Infinite*, 2nd edn, New York 1963. The concept is also articulated (often via citation of Nicolson) in, e.g., S. C. Bourassa, *The Aesthetics of Landscape*, London 1991, p. 12; K. Thomas, *Man and the Natural World: Changing Attitudes in England, 1500–1800*, London 1983, pp. 258–61; A. Carlson, *Aesthetics and the Environment: The Appreciation of Nature, Art, and Architecture*, London and New York 2000, pp. 72 and 83–85; and R. MacFarlane, *Mountains of the Mind: A History of a Fascination*, London 2004, pp. 18–21. The disciplinary and indeed generic range (from academic monographs to works of popular history) represented by these citations speaks to the widespread perception of a stark aesthetic shift towards 'mountain glory' with the advent of modernity.

6. For a skilful summary of the historiography of the natural sublime see Duffy (as in n. 1), pp. 6–7, who credits S. H. Monk's *The Sublime: A Study of Critical Theories in Eighteenth-Century England*, New York 1935, in establishing the early 18th-century British tradition as the precursor to Kant's later developments. For a good modern translation of *On the Sublime*, see the Loeb Classical Library edition, ed. and tr. W. Hamilton Fyfe, rev. D. Russell, Cambridge MA and London 1995. The work attracted intense interest not just in the modern but also in the early modern period; see *Translations of the Sublime: The Early Modern Reception and Dissemination of Longinus' 'Peri Hupsous' in Rhetoric, the Visual Arts, Architecture and the Theatre*, ed. C. A. van Eck et al., Leiden 2012. For the apparent shift from the rhetorical to the 'aesthetic' sublime see R. Doran, *The Theory of the Sublime from Longinus to Kant*, Cambridge 2015, pp. 15–19; for the English writers see ibid., p. 19, and T. M. Costelloe, 'Imagination and Internal Sense: The Sublime in Shaftesbury, Reid, Addison, and Reynolds', in *The Sublime: From Antiquity to the Present*, ed. idem, New York and Cambridge 2012, pp. 50–63.

7. Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful*, London 1757; Immanuel Kant, *Kritik der Urteilskraft*, Berlin and Libau 1790.

the 'analytic sublime' identified sublimity not as a quality of the object being viewed, but of the mind viewing it. What was truly sublime was the rational human ability to resist being overwhelmed by the grandeur of nature.[8]

This tidy narrative has not gone uncontested. James Porter has noted that Longinus's articulation of the sublime alluded to the effects of natural as well as textual examples of 'greatness' and has posited that it represents not the origin of the idea of sublimity but rather the earliest surviving example of it.[9] Meanwhile, Duffy highlights the ongoing complexity of aesthetic responses following the 'invention' of the natural sublime in the late eighteenth century. He notes that in addition to sensory input, scientific inquiry also had the potential to generate sublime experiences.[10] Furthermore, he suggests that the significance attached to Kant's analytical, 'disinterested' model of sublimity has resulted in the neglect of an important kind of sublime experience: the kind of encounters which were 'quintessentially interested', and for which the response to the sublime was tied up in an appreciation of the historical and cultural associations of a particular space or landscape. For Duffy, while the 'natural sublime' is a useful term for the eighteenth century and Romantic period, it should be understood not as an abstract aesthetic concept but as a response to specific locations and phenomena which was augmented by scientific investigation and an appreciation of landscapes as 'classic ground', broadly conceived.[11]

In the present article I re-examine both the standard narrative and its variations, through the lens provided by responses to Etna. I begin with a close reading of Brydone's account, then look back at previous descriptions of the same volcano, the earliest of which dates to the same period as Pseudo-Longinus himself.[12] My analysis of Brydone's *Tour* emphasises the interplay between the three elements of his experience of Etna: the natural philosophical; the aesthetic; and the classical. I then proceed to read Brydone's account alongside progressively earlier texts: the writings of the British natural philosopher Thomas Burnet (c. 1635–1715), the Jesuit polymath Athanasius Kircher (1602–1680), the humanist Pietro Bembo (1470–1547), and the anonymous, first-century AD author of the Latin poem *Aetna*. Each example demonstrates a sense of overwhelming awe in the face of the grandeur and frightfulness of nature. Nevertheless, and perhaps more intriguingly, they also show the 'sublime' encounter intensified by empirical observation and the attempt to understand the volcano on a rational level. In addition, they are each rooted in a clear sense of the landscape as imbued with cultural, largely classical, memory, which also often served both to add to the appreciation of the volcano and to inform the analysis of its phenomena.

8. K. Brillenburg Wurth, 'How the Dwarf Became the Giant: S. T. Coleridge's Kantian Appreciation of Sublime Nature in the Lake District', in *Green and Pleasant Land: English Culture and the Romantic Countryside*, ed. A. Gilroy, Leuven 2004, pp. 19–29.

9. See J. I. Porter, *The Sublime in Antiquity*, Cambridge 2016, preface and ch. 1 for the pre-Longinian sublime.

10. Duffy (as in n. 1), pp. 3–4.

11. Ibid., pp. 7–15.

12. Indeed, Pseudo-Longinus himself alludes to Etna when illustrating the human attraction to the great, noting that he find the eruptions of the volcano wonderful, while taking the small fires in their own hearths for granted; see *On the Sublime*, 35.4; and Porter (as in n. 9), p. 383.

Using these texts, I construct an argument in successive stages and, in doing so, seek to make three interventions in our understanding of the history of the natural sublime as an aesthetic response. I begin by demonstrating that writers from before the eighteenth-century 'watershed' of the sublime experienced sensations of awe and 'agreeable horror' when faced, either physically or mentally, with remarkable objects of nature, in this case volcanoes. That the development of a new rhetoric of natural sublimity in the eighteenth century did not, in fact, mark the 'invention' of the natural sublime, has already been pointed out by previous scholars. My first intervention, which is developed throughout the article as a whole, is to argue for the need to distinguish between the distinct aesthetic language of natural sublimity which developed in the eighteenth century, and the more general sensations of fear and awe as an aesthetic experience evident across time as a response to the 'great in nature'.[13] I also highlight contextually specific nuances to this, for example, the significance of eschatological ideas in the aesthetic responses of seventeenth-century natural philosophers.

As my second intervention, I demonstrate that a compulsion to investigate and understand those natural phenomena which inspire this sense of awe was by no means confined to the Enlightenment. In each of the examples I shall consider, Etna fascinates not simply due to its remarkable sensory phenomena, but as a landscape which offers unique insights into the workings of nature.

Thirdly, and in the same vein, I suggest that a sense of Etna as inseparable from its 'classic ground'—a feature of the landscape which both intensified the viewer's interest in its natural phenomena and produced an 'interested' aesthetic experience of its natural greatness—likewise extends back even to the ancient texts from which later travellers drew cultural associations.

Each of the elements of volcanic engagement I shall identify in Brydone—the aesthetic, the empirical and the cultural—are thus, I propose, evident in earlier texts. Moreover, the dynamic interplay between them that we find in Brydone has, too, parallels in the earlier texts, for they intersect with and serve to intensify one another in each of the examples considered. Their several writers did not, of course, all have the 'same' response to Etna. By paying attention to these three essential threads, however, we can appreciate the distinctive ways in which each one is invoked and related to the other two in a range of different texts written across very different centuries and genres.

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13. R. Bevis, *The Road to Egdon Heath: The Aesthetics of the Great in Nature*, Montreal and Kingston 1999, navigated the semantically challenging waters of 'the sublime' by referring to 'the aesthetics of the great in nature'; likewise, Nicolson (as in n. 5) referred to 'the aesthetics of the infinite', which enabled both, particularly Bevis, to speak of pre-modern examples of 'Great' aesthetics without anachronism. Both, however, utilised these sublime synonyms to discuss the development of, and occasional exceptional antecedents to, a dramatic shift in taste in the 18th century.

APPROACHING, CLIMBING AND DEPARTING FROM ETNA: PATRICK BRYDONE'S 'MODERN' EXPERIENCE

Brydone's *Tour*, presented as a series of letters to a Suffolk gentleman, William Beckford, opens with the protest that the author only went to press in order to produce 'a monument of his friendship with the gentleman to whom they are addressed'.[14] The epistolary format was, at the time, used for a range of different kinds of publication. As Amy Elizabeth Smith has shown, it became a respected, professional literary genre which could be employed either in formal contexts, such as the published letters in the *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society*, or in less formal ones such travel narratives, to evoke a rhetoric of familiarity and intimacy between author and reader, by publishing an account in the format of letters written to a personal friend.[15] It is thus important to approach Brydone's account as a literary construction designed to entertain and engage the reader.

When approaching Brydone's account of Mount Etna, it is easy to focus merely or mainly on the second of his two letters of 29 May 1770, in which he recounted reaching the summit of the volcano and the sublime experiences which he enjoyed there. Such an approach to his text, however, understates the significance of Mount Etna as a recurring figure throughout the entire first volume of the *Tour*, and the multivalent ways in which he viewed the peak. He writes of Etna before he has actually seen it, as if alerting both himself and his correspondent to the summit in store for them both. He writes of Etna as he is on it, climbing it; and then, reasserting its importance, he proceeds to write looking back at it, as various sea voyages take him out of and then bring him back into sight of its smoking top. The three strands of his experience of Etna—as the locus not just of aesthetic enjoyment, but also of classical memory and of opportunities to observe and better understand the phenomena of the natural world—come to the fore and intersect with one another at distinct moments.

Before his travels and thus the contents of his letters turn towards Etna, Brydone introduces his reader to a landscape which already evokes thoughts both of the wonder of volcanic phenomena and of classical myth and memory. On entering the Bay of Naples, described in a letter of 15 May 1770, he observes the ever-shifting nature of the volcanic landscape: 'Mountains and islands, that were celebrated for their fertility, changed into barren wastes; and barren wastes into fertile fields and rich vineyards. Mountains sunk into plains, and plains swelled into mountains.'[16] In addition to this symbolically rich, metamorphising view,

14. Brydone (as in n. 1), I, p. 6.

15. See A. E. Smith, 'Travel Narratives and the Familiar Letter Form in the Mid-Eighteenth Century', *Studies in Philology*, XCV, 1998, pp. 77–96; and eadem, 'Naming the Un-"Familiar": Formal Letters and Travel Narratives in Late Seventeenth- and Eighteenth-Century Britain', *The Review of English Studies*, LIV, no. 214, 2003, pp. 178–202. Smith argues that the 'veracity' of the correspondence presented in such narratives does not matter so much as the rhetoric of familiarity and intimacy evoked between author and reader by publishing an account in the format of letters written to a personal friend. She also distinguishes between An example of the more formal epistolary format in relation to volcanic phenomena can be found in William Hamilton's *Observations on Mount Vesuvius, Mount Etna, and Other Volcanoes: In a Series of Letters, Addressed to the Royal Society*, London 1772.

16. Brydone (as in n. 1), I, p. 19. The echoes of Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, XV.266–69, are striking: 'quodque fuit

Brydone also took in the sight of locations of key events of classical history: the island of Capri inhabited first by Augustus and then by Tiberius; 'the celebrated promontory of Micænum, where Æneas landed'; and the Campi Phlegraei, 'where Jupiter overcame the giants'.[17] Before Etna, Brydone had the pleasure of observing both Vesuvius and Stromboli, and comparing their distinctive physical forms and the nature of their eruptive activities.

Mount Etna, however, rises above these other volcanoes in terms both of legend and of physical characteristics. In a letter of 21 May, he apologises for the 'fabulous' nature of any story he may relate with reference to Sicily, in general, and Etna, in particular:

> …you will please to remember, that I am now in the country of fable; this island having given rise to more perhaps, except Greece, than all the world beside. You have, therefore, only to suppose that these regions are still contagious; and call to mind that mount Ætna has ever been the great mother of monsters and chimeras both in the antient and the modern world.[18]

In spite of the danger of such 'infection', Brydone promises to include in his letters 'only … such subjects as fall, under my own observation', although, looking ahead to his visit, he warns the reader that even empirical details might seem as 'fabulous' as myth to those who have never seen a volcano for themselves.[19] He signs off with the assurance that he will write 'from Catania, if we escape unhurt from all the perils of Ætna'.[20]

That letter is followed by several more, all dated in the next week, in which he repeatedly promises that with the next one his correspondent will truly get to 'see' Etna, as he himself proceeds closer and closer to its summit, describing the aesthetic wonders, classical memories and scientific insights which he encounters on his way. The idea of Etna is always the cliff-hanger, or the 'to be continued', on which Brydone encourages his reader to hang their anticipation. Two letters, of 22 and 24 May, look forward to Etna 'tomorrow', but only in the conclusion to his letter of 26 May does Brydone's promise of an impending mountain narrative ring true, along with an assertion of the significance of the climb: 'We are going to be very busy; and are preparing every thing for one of the greatest objects of our expedition; —The examination of mount Ætna.'[21] Finally, six missives and eight days after his initial 'tomorrow', his next two letters, both dated 29 May, describe his ascent of Etna that day and night.

The bulk of the first letter of 29 May views the volcano through a deliberately natural philosophical lens. Brydone introduces the reader to the three distinct regions below Etna's summit: the first fertile, the second woody and the third

campus, vallem decursus aquarum fecit, et eluvie mons est deductus in aequor, eque paludosa siccis humus aret harenis, quaeque sitim tulerant, stagnata paludibus ument' ('what once was a level plain, down-flowing waters have made into a valley; and hills by the force of floods have been washed into the sea. What was once marsh is now a parched stretch of dry sand, and what once was dry and thirsty now is a marshy pool'; tr. F. J. Miller, rev. G. P. Goold, Loeb Classical Library, II, London 1984).

17. Brydone (as in n. 1), I, p. 20.

18. Ibid., I, p. 90.

19. Ibid., I, p. 91.

20. Ibid.

21. Ibid., I, p. 151; for his previous promises of Etna 'tomorrow' see p. 98 and 125.

barren—three bands of space which more or less map onto 'the three zones of the earth', that is, the torrid, temperate and frigid zones.[22] In passing through the first region, which is covered in lava but is nevertheless (or, indeed, therefore) remarkably fruitful, Brydone describes and interrogates the causes of 'an infinite number of the most beautiful little mountains on earth, which are every where scattered about on the immense declivity of Ætna'. From empirical description he moves to empirical measurement, arousing the consternation of local observers by appearing to behave as a 'conjurer' when wielding a magnetic needle and an electrometer in an attempt to 'examine the electrical state of the air'.[23]

Brydone is also careful to record contemporary folk beliefs relating to the mountain. When he peers into one of the caverns near its base, his guide informs him that 'some people had lost their senses from having advanced too far, imagining that they saw devils and the spirits of the damned; for it is still very generally believed here, that Ætna is the mouth of hell'.[24] The allusion serves Brydone well when he later shifts into an aesthetic mode as he muses on the strangely contrary nature of Etna. In reaching 'the Regione Sylvosa, or the Temperate Zone', he notes that 'if Ætna resembles hell within, it may with equal justice be said to resemble paradise without'.[25] Further contrasts ensue, as he reflects on a mountain that 'reunite[s] every beauty and every horrour': gulfs that once threw out fire now overgrown with vegetation, bushes of fruit growing from old lavas, fields of flowers distracting the visitor from the thought that 'hell, with all its terrours, is immediately under our feet', and, most surprising of all, at the very summit of the mountain,

> in perpetual union, the two elements that are at perpetual war; an immense gulph of fire, for ever existing in the midst of snows that it has not the power to melt; and immense fields of snow and ice for ever surrounding this gulph of fire, which they have not the power to extinguish.[26]

His enthusiasm for acquiring and organising knowledge about Etna—ranging from taking measurements to recording folk beliefs and categorising the different 'zones' of the mountain—thus leads smoothly to passages evoking the beauty and aesthetically startling contrasts of the natural landscape.

Before closing his letter, Brydone returns to more strictly natural philosophical reflections. Resting on a pillow of leaves, he considers the slow cooling of lava flows, and wonders whether it would be possible to apply Isaac Newton's theories relating to the Great Comet of 1680 in order to calculate the age of specific lavas based on their temperature.[27] The dramatic interval of sleep, however, presages a switching of modes. His second letter—one of the longest in the volume—very quickly moves from the natural philosophical to the experiential and, crucially, to classical memory as an important feature of that experience.

22. Ibid., I, pp. 154–55.
23. Ibid., I, p. 168. Brydone had a particular interest in electricity throughout his life, with multiple publications on the subject in the *Philosophical Transactions*; see Evans (as in n. 1), pp. 33–36 and 118–21.
24. Brydone (as in n. 1), I, p. 165.
25. Ibid., I, p. 172.
26. Ibid., I, pp. 173–74.
27. Ibid., I, pp. 176–79.

Following 'the Cyclops', their conductor, Brydone and his companions departed from their camp at 11 p.m., and found the sylvan beauty of their environs much changed in the darkness. Passing through the whispering trees, with the sight of the ocean far below them, seated on mules treading along precipitous lavas, 'inspired a kind of awful horror'. Worse was still to come: on passing out of the wooded zone, they 'beheld an expanse of snow and ice that … almost staggered our resolution', and, above it, the summit 'vomiting out torrents of smoke'. Their conductor warned of the dangers ahead of them: that the black ashes concealed spots where the snow beneath had been melted by the heat of the volcano, so that they might walk into danger without even being aware of it. Yet once the group had held a 'council of war, which you know people generally do when they are very much afraid', and decided to continue, the Cyclops passed round a bottle of brandy, and urged all 'to be of good cheer'.[28]

Though the brandy apparently helped, the liquor was not the only thing which encouraged Brydone as he made his steep, snowy way up Etna's high slopes, recollecting

> … in the midst of our fatigue, that the emperor Adrian [*sic*] and the philosopher Plato underwent the same; and from the same motive too, to see the rising sun from the top of Ætna.[29]

Fuelled by this thought, they arrived, their fatigue 'mixed with a great deal of pleasure', at the ruins of 'an antient structure', thought to have been either built by Empedocles or to constructed as a temple of Vulcan, 'whose shop, all the world knows … was ever kept in mount Ætna'.[30] The group rested and took another dram, of which Brydone commented that 'I am persuaded, both Vulcan and Empedocles, had they been here, would have greatly approved … after such a march'.[31]

It is striking that again and again, at the moments of greatest physical struggle or fear, Brydone turns to the landscape of classical memory to provide comfort and reassurance against the challenges of the physical landscape around him. Yet his recourse to classical associations yields more than this, for they serve to intensify the pleasure of his aesthetic responses. At the 'Torre del Philosopho', he made quick barometric readings, then the group paused 'to pay our adorations in a silent contemplation of the sublime objects of nature'. Noting the clarity of the air at such altitude, Brydone is driven to exclaim: 'What a glorious situation for an observatory! Had Empedocles had the eyes of Gallileo [*sic*] what discoveries must he not

28. Ibid., I, p. 180–82.

29. Ibid., I, p. 183. Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*, III.18, claims that Plato visited the craters of Etna on his first visit to Sicily. The claim that Hadrian ascended Mount Etna is likewise made in a later biography; see *Scriptores Historiae Augustae*, XIII.3.

30. Ibid., I, pp. 183–84. Here, Brydone is alluding to the legend of the philosopher Empedocles, who, wishing to be thought a god, threw himself into the crater of Mount Etna so that it would seem he had miraculously vanished; however, one of his brass sandals was thrown from the crater, revealing the truth of his suicide. A. Kenny, 'Life After Etna: Empedocles in Prose and Poetry', in idem, *From Empedocles to Wittgenstein: Historical Essays in Philosophy*, Oxford 2008, pp. 14–28, demonstrates that fascination with Empedocles's legendary death on Etna grew from the 17th century onwards, reaching the summit of its literary reception with Matthew Arnold's 1852 epic poem 'Empedocles on Etna'.

31. Brydone (as in n. 1), I, p. 184.

have made!'[32] Nevertheless, after a brief interlude of timed stages and further barometric readings, the group arrived at the summit of the mountain, where sublime experience drove any classical or fantastical associations out of Brydone's mind—or at least out of his narrative.[33]

At the summit, in fact, Brydone's descriptions vacillate between empirical observation and his indulgence in almost every feature of eighteenth-century depictions of the natural sublime. The view is introduced as 'the most wonderful and sublime sight in nature', one which exceeds description or imagination, for there is nowhere else on the globe 'that unites so many awful and sublime objects'.[34] The peak is so high and so solitary that there is no 'neighbouring mountain for the senses and imagination to rest upon' as their possessor gazes down to the world below; the gulf of the volcano before them is 'as old as the world', billowing fire, thundering with noise; the prospect, or view, encompasses 'the greatest diversity and the most beautiful scenery in nature'; and the sun rising in the east illuminates all.[35] Every contrast of overwhelming wonder and horror, so characteristic of the sublime, can be found in Brydone's reported experience of Etna. In the face of such a scene, there is no room for him to turn to classical precedent, although compellingly there is space for the biblical: 'Both sea and land looked dark and confused, as if only emerging from their original chaos' (that is, the unformed matter out of which God fashioned the heavens and the earth), until the sunrise slowly reveals 'a new creation rising to the sight', and then finally 'the sun, like the great Creator, appears in the east'.[36] In this moment, the sublime becomes a religious experience.

After re-enumerating the multiple 'zones' of the mountain—with descriptions of flora and geomorphological features interspersed with aesthetic commentary and classical allusions—Brydone finally turns to describe the 'fourth region of Ætna … the region of fire'.[37] Though his account of the summit crater continues to display the expected features of a sublime experience, he also deliberately acknowledges the long history of fascination which he knows the sight held for countless visitors before him:

> That tremendous gulph so celebrated in all ages, looked upon as the terror and scourge both of this and another life; and equally useful to ancient poets, or to modern divines, when the Muse, or when the Spirit inspires. We beheld it with awe and with horror, and were not surprised that it had been considered as the place of the damned … the most enthusiastic imagination, in the midst of all its terrors, hardly ever formed an idea of a hell more dreadful.[38]

The group departs from the crater 'with a mixture both of pleasure and pain', and on his descent Brydone continues to vacillate between empirical and classical modes of viewing and experiencing the mountain.[39] Curious to discover the impact of the density of air on the production of sound, he went to the length of

32. Ibid., I, pp. 184–85.
33. Ibid., I, pp. 186–87.
34. Ibid., I, p. 187.
35. Ibid., I, p. 188.
36. Ibid., I, p. p. 189.
37. Ibid., I, pp. 192–95.
38. Ibid., I, pp. 196–97.
39. Ibid., I, p. 197.

'discharging a gun', which he apparently had about his person, and was intrigued to discover that the sound 'was almost reduced to nothing'.[40] At the foot of the cone, he came across 'some rocks truly of a most incredible size'; he remarks that they were far larger than any that had been observed to have erupted from Vesuvius.[41] The group then arrived once more at the ruins of the 'Torre del Philosopho', and paused while Brydone related the story of Empedocles, noting that 'if there is such a thing as philosophy on earth, surely this ought to be the seat of it', and gesturing towards the remarkable view, the purity of the air and the variety of phenomena to be enjoyed from the spot: 'Surely the situation alone, is enough to inspire philosophy, and Empedocles had good reason for chusing it.'[42] The further Brydone moves into his account of his 'summit day', the more his account blends aesthetics, observation, and classical precedents, presented in a manner which invites the reader to share in the intensity and immediacy of his experience.

Brydone's empirical, sensual and historical immersion in the landscape of Etna was, however, rudely interrupted: slipping on the ice and spraining his ankle, his 'philosophy was at once overset' and he 'relapsed into a poor miserable mortal'.[43] He concludes his letter with the reflection that in it he has described a 'day, in which, I think, I have enjoyed a greater degree of pleasure, and suffered a greater degree of pain, than in any other day of my life'.[44] The reader is therefore conscious that his next letter, of 30 May, was written either from Brydone's sick-bed or at least with his feet up. The mode of his account now shifts once more. The bulk of this letter is taken up with an overview of past writings and stories relating to the mountain, but presented as articles of antiquarian interest rather than as foils to his own physical experience.[45] They include the ancient story of the brothers Amphinomus and Anapias (of whom more later), who, rather than seeking to save their worldly goods from a massive eruption of Etna, instead carried their aged parents on their backs and were thus spared by the lava flows.[46] Next comes Lord Winchelsea's account of the 1669 eruption. Brydone criticises the earl for failing to ascend and closely investigate the mountain immediately after its most cataclysmic eruption in centuries.[47] Then he returns to classical writings on Etna, including those of Virgil, Lucretius, Pindar and Thucydides, all of which are subject to a

40. Ibid., I, p. 198.
41. Ibid., I, pp. 198–99.
42. Ibid., I, pp. 199–202.
43. Ibid., I, p. 202.
44. Ibid., I, p. 205.
45. Ibid., I, pp. 236–45.
46. Ibid., I, pp. 239–40 (Amphinomus is given as as 'Ansinomus'). For literary sources on the *pii fratres*, who were also celebrated on Roman coins for their courage and loyalty, see, e.g., Strabo, *Geography*, VI.2.3, and Seneca the Younger, *De beneficiis*, III.37.2.
47. Ibid., I, p. 245. Winchelsea's account was first published as Heneage Finch, Earl of Winchelsea, *A True and Exact Relation of the Late Prodigious Earthquake & Eruption of Mount Ætna, or, Monte-Gibello; Written to His Majesty from Naples …*, [London] 1669. It was reissued in London and also published in Dublin, Edinburgh and Cambridge MA that same year. In 1775, Winchelsea's account was reproduced alongside other texts relating to the 1669 eruption and an anonymous letter (which made extensive reference to the writings of William Hamilton) detailing the more recent 1766 eruption: *An Exact Relation of the Famous Earthquake and Eruption of Mount Ætna, or Mont-Gibello, A.D. 1669, Being One of the Greatest Recorded in History; Now Reprinted from a Scarce Pamphlet … . To which also is Now Added a Genuine Letter, Written to a Late Noble Peer, Purposing to Describe the Last Great Eruption, as well as a Journey to the Very Summit of Mount Ætna, in the Year 1766*, London 1775.

similar criticism: Thucydides, for instance, though he recorded three eruptions of Etna, 'is not so particular as we could have wished' in his details.[48]

Whereas his letter of the day before had conveyed an overlap between 'classic ground' and his aesthetic response to the mountain, these quibbles over investigatory lapses highlight an overlap between past allusions to the volcano and his natural philosophical interests. From Thucydides to Winchelsea, earlier accounts are mined for potential natural philosophical knowledge. Indeed, Brydone explicitly compares his own observations and measurements of Etna's different phenomena—its height, the lightning visible around its summit during eruptions, the caverns around its base—with those of past visitors to the mountain, particularly Athanasius Kircher.[49] Crucially, however, Brydone also suggests there is a certain kinship between these empirical investigations and Etna's mythological associations. The volcano has, he observes, afforded ample employment for the muse, in all ages, and in all languages; and indeed the philosopher and natural historian have found, in the real properties of the mountain, as ample a fund of speculation as the poets have done in the fictitious.[50] Here, the 'various fables and allegories' attached to Etna are not presented as in any way informing his natural philosophical investigations, but rather as parallels to them. Both are equally inspired by the remarkable nature of the mountain.

Signing off at last, Brydone's tone is wistful: he reflects that 'we may now try to take leave of Ætna, though I am afraid, during the remainder of our expedition, we shall meet with nothing at all worthy to succeed to it'.[51] This prediction proves all too true, and in the letters that follow he cannot refrain from returning to the mountain. Brydone takes up his pen again two days later on 1 June, and his first comment is on the view of Etna as they voyage away from it, and he dwells once again on different classical and natural philosophical perspectives on the volcano.[52] At sea on 4 June, en route to Malta, Etna is the only land in sight: 'the perpetual polar star of these seas'.[53] In the ante-penultimate letter of the first volume, dated 11 June, Etna circles back into partial sight one final time: wrapped in their cloaks on a boat departing Calypso, Brydone and his companions 'saw only a part of mount Ætna smoking above the waters'.[54]

Although his second letter of 29 May recounts Brydone's actual ascent of the mountain, Etna is present in almost 300 pages of the *Tour*, representing three full weeks—from 21 May to 11 June—of the month-long span of travel included in the first volume. During that month he visits or describes numerous other sights as well, but he is constantly looking forward to Etna on approach and constantly looking back to it after departure, making his visit to it the narrative peak of his

48. Brydone (as in n. 1), I, pp. 246–52. He quotes Virgil, *Aeneid*, III.571–76, in Latin, and gives Pindar, *Pythian*, I.18–24, in English (from the 1749 translation of Gilbert West). He neither quotes nor cites exact sources for Lucretius or Thucydides, but we may assume he had in mind Lucretius, *De rerum natura*, VI.680–70, and Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War*, III.116.

49. Ibid., I, pp. 207–13 (measurements), 227–28 (lightning), 232 (caverns). I discuss Kircher's account below, beginning p. 312.

50. Ibid., I, p. 246.

51. Ibid., I, p. 252.

52. Ibid., I, pp. 253–59.

53. Ibid., I, p. 305.

54. Ibid., I, p. 346.

journey. In his letters relating to Etna, he draws on the different strands of his experience: the classical, the scientific and the aesthetic. Together, these strands form a holistic sense of the peak as an object of interest and appreciation.

Through reading Brydone in this way, we can appreciate the similarities between his response to Etna and those of earlier commentators. As I shall demonstrate in the next two sections of this essay, Brydone followed in the footsteps not just of classical authors but also of closer, early modern predecessors. These previous writings likewise wove together the threads of intellectual investigation, aesthetic awe and a sense of Etna's ancient past to evoke the extraordinary nature of the volcano.

ESCHATOLOGY AND AWE: ETNA IN THE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY

Mountains, and volcanoes as a fiery subcategory of them, often featured in seventeenth-century natural philosophical texts. Their authors do not exhibit Brydone's post-Enlightenment enthusiasm for taking precise measurements or conducting experiments on the slopes, but they do treat volcanoes as mental laboratories for better understanding nature. Crucially, they took for granted that the world was the creation of God and would be destroyed by him at the moment of apocalypse. As I argue in this section, seventeenth-century investigations of Etna were, like Brydone's later account, informed by both personal observation and the collation of older knowledge about the peak. In this earlier period, however, they led to sensations of eschatological awe coloured by the belief that volcanoes were the mechanism by which the earth would ultimately be remade.

The final volume of Thomas Burnet's controversial *Theory of the Earth* (1684–1690) features precisely this idea.[55] Burnet is most famous for the first book of his *Theory*, in which he posited that mountains were the result not of God's original act of creation, but of the Flood, or Deluge. He was concerned, however, not just with the early history of the earth but with its entire cycle of existence: from the shapeless chaos at the beginning of creation, through to the conflagration and the creation of a new heaven and a new earth. In his first volume, he sought to provide a rational, natural explanation for the form of the current earth, without requiring God to 'do and undo' different aspects of his creation through miraculous intervention.[56] In the second volume, he set out to demonstrate the natural causes by which the end of the world would be brought about. His case, in accordance with the scriptural knowledge that the world would ultimately be destroyed by fire, was

55. Thomas Burnet, *The Theory of the Earth: Containing an Account of the Original of the Earth, and of All the General Changes which it hath Already Undergone, or is to Undergo, till the Consummation of All Things*, 2 vols, London 1684–90. Burnet and his *Theory* have long attracted scholarly attention; for just a few examples, see H. V. S. Ogden, 'Thomas Burnet's *Telluris Theoria Sacra* and Mountain Scenery', *ELH*, 14.2, 1947, pp. 139–50; Nicolson (as in n. 5), pp. 215–16, 222 and 224 (identifying Burnet as one of the first British writers to demonstrate an inkling of the sublime); R. Porter, *The Making of Geology: Earth Science in Britain, 1660–1815*, Cambridge 1977, pp. 33–45 and 75–86; S. J. Gould, *Time's Arrow, Time's Cycle: Myth and Metaphor in the Discovery of Geological Time*, Cambridge MA 1987, pp. 21–51; and A. Wragge-Morley, 'A Strange and Surprising Debate: Mountains, Original Sin and "Science" in Seventeenth-Century England', *Endeavour*, xxxiii.2, 2009, pp. 76–80.

56. Burnet (as in n. 55), i, pp. 19–20.

that 'there must be treasures of fire provided against that day', already in existence within the frame of the earth.[57] Rejecting the possibility of the sun drawing near enough to the earth to set it aflame, and the idea that the 'Central Fire' (the core of the earth) would spontaneously burst its bounds, he instead envisaged an extension of a phenomenon already visible: the eruption of volcanoes.

Burnet introduces his theme with a reflection on the difficulty of ever conceiving the overwhelming reality of such objects without standing in front of them:

> There is certainly nothing more terrible in all Nature than fiery Mountains, to those that live within the view or noise of them; but it is not easie for us, who never see them nor heard them, to represent them to our selves with such just and lively imaginations as shall excite in us the same passions, and the same horror as they would excite, if present to our senses.[58]

This passage, with its horror and passions, and its foregrounding of the viewer's sensory experience of the volcano, could easily be read as an early prefiguration of the natural sublime as reported by Brydone. Burnet's aesthetic response, however, is preceded by that of yet earlier volcanic texts, while also being coloured by presumptions which Brydone, writing over a century later, would not share. Seeking to identify the 'first' account which anticipates the post-Enlightenment natural sublime is perhaps to ask the wrong question.

Burnet observes that volcanoes can be observed across the face of the earth, but he devotes most attention to Etna and Vesuvius, which 'from all memory of man and the most ancient records of History have been fam'd for their Treasures of subterraneous Fires', and which promise 'to stand till the last fire [the apocalypse] as a type and prefiguration of it'.[59] Contemporary and classical accounts of the eruptions of these two volcanoes allow him to construct a sneak preview of the apocalypse, and to demonstrate that taken together the volcanoes of the world already contained more than sufficient fuel for a worldwide conflagration. He notes the 'vast *Burning Stones*' which were reportedly flung out of Etna in the midst of its 1669 eruption, and asks: 'What trifles are our Mortar-pieces and Bombes, when compar'd with these Engines of Nature?'.[60] Burnet also quotes at length from Cassius Dio's account of Vesuvius to illustrate the destructive force of a single volcano, before urging his reader to imagine every volcano in the world erupting simultaneously.[61] He concludes the chapter by giving Pliny the Elder the last word, quoting his reflections on the ubiquity of volcanoes and the matter which fuels them: '*IT EXCEEDS ALL MIRACLES, IN MY OPINION, THAT ONE DAY SHOULD PASS WITHOUT SETTING THE WORLD ALL ON FIRE*'.[62]

This historical investigation serves as a preamble to a remarkable set-piece, in which Burnet narrates the final conflagration and the Second Coming in all its awesome detail:

57. Ibid., II, p. 43.
58. Ibid., II, p. 56.
59. Ibid., II, pp. 57–58.
60. Ibid., II, pp. 59–60.
61. Ibid., II, pp. 60–61, citing Cassius Dio, *Roman History*, LXVI.22.
62. Ibid., II, p. 65, citing Pliny the Elder, *Natural History*, II.239: 'excedet profecto miracula omnia ullum diem fuisse quo non cuncta conflagrarent'.

The countenance of the Heavens will be dark and gloomy; and a Veil drawn over the face of the Sun. The Earth in disposition every where to break into open flames. The tops of the Mountains smoaking … the Sea sunk … Balls of fire rowling in the Skie, and pointed lightnings darted against the Earth.[63]

In the stillness after so much disruption, he imagines the destruction of even the greatest of human works: '*Rome* it self, *Eternal Rome*, the Great City, the Empress of the world', is gone, but that is not all: 'the everlasting Hills, the Mountains and Rocks of the Earth, are melted as Wax before the Sun'. Burnet reads a eulogistic roll-call of the peaks and ranges which have been, as Scripture promised, 'made low' by the conflagration (Isaiah 40.4): the Alps, Mount Atlas, the Caucasus and Taurus ranges, the Riphaean Hills, are all 'vanish'd, dropt away as the Snow upon their heads: and swallow'd up in a red Sea of fire'. Burnet closes this chapter with a prayer: '*Great and marvellous are thy Works, Lord God Almighty* … Hallelujah' (Revelation 15.3).[64] Brydone, amazed by the sunrise from the summit of Mount Etna, understood his sublime experience with reference to 'the great Creator'. For Burnet, the awe-inspiring nature of volcanoes is intensified by his conviction, as a natural philosopher fascinated by the workings of the earth, that they represent the ultimate act of divine destruction.

Burnet was by no means the first early modern thinker to draw a connection between volcanoes and the end of the world, or to use the glory and horror of the one to illustrate the other. The 1669 eruption to which he would refer two decades after the fact prompted a flurry of English publications at the time. A broadsheet ballad on 'Mount Ætna's Flames' (1669), in somewhat forced rhyme, gave 'thanks to God on high / That we such sorrows are not nigh', while a Neo-Latin poem, 'In nuperam horrendam montis Ætnæ eruptionem, carmen' (1670), concluded its description of the eruption by reminding the reader that just as the earth had once been destroyed by water (the Flood), its final end would come in the form of fire.[65] Lord Winchelsea's letter about the event, which Brydone would later find so unsatisfying, was published in rapid succession in London, Edinburgh and Dublin, alongside a selection of descriptions in other letters.[66]

Perhaps the most intriguing publication to be released in English on the occasion of the 1669 eruption was an anonymous, eighty-page treatise on *The Volcano's: or, Burning and Fire-Vomiting Mountains, Famous in the World*, which marketed itself as being 'Collected for the Most Part out of Kircher's Subterraneous World'.[67] The text does indeed serve as a partial translation of the *Mundus subterraneus*, published by the Jesuit polymath Athanasius Kircher in 1665.[68]

63. Burnet (as in n. 55), II, p.103.

64. Ibid., II, p. 111; see p. 79 for the fulfilment of Isaiah.

65. *Mount Ætna's Flames. Or, the Sicilian Wonder* …, [London 1669]; D. B., *In nuperam horrendam Montis Ætnæ eruptionem, carmen*, London 1670, p. 10 ('Scilicet, ut quondam venit Cataclysmus aquarum, / Sic orbem perdet flammarum copia').

66. See n. 47 above.

67. *The Vulcano's: or, Burning and Fire-Vomiting Mountains*, London 1669, title-page.

68. Athanasius Kircher, *Mundus subterraneus: in XII. libros digestus, quo divinum subterrestris mundi opificium universae denique naturæ majestas et divitiae summa rerum varietate exponuntur*, 2 vols, Amsterdam 1665. The remarkable scope of Kircher's interests has attracted extensive modern scholarly attention; see, e.g., Thomas Leinkauf, *Mundus combinatus. Studien*

This compilation, however, is more than a straightforward translation, with the anonymous editor deliberately priming the reader to interpret both the extracts from the *Mundus* and the recent eruption of Etna in a specific light. The opening epistle asserts the need for a handbook of 'Historical Relations by others' on the nature of volcanoes to be published in English, 'by reason of so general and universal Ignorance of these Matters found among our Countreymen' after the 1669 eruption. The aim of the volume was to lay out the natural history of 'so admirable and curious' a phenomenon as the eruption of volcanoes, not for the benefit of the educated elites, but 'for … benefit to his Countreymen, in Englishing so wonderful things'. Those holding the volume in their hands were urged to 'Read, and admire, and take the pleasure thereof'.[69] Here, again—even if in a very different form from Brydone's technical measurements and experiments—is the equation between knowledge and understanding of Etna, and the admiration of it.

For the author of *The Volcano's*, as for Brydone, knowing volcanoes meant, among other things, knowing ancient allusions to them. In offering a general explication of volcanic phenomena, the volume makes extensive reference to classical authors, of whom Lucretius is quoted most, often at length.[70] Just as Burnet would do, the author explains that 'hardly any Region in the world' is without a volcano, highlighting the strange contrast between the 'cold and frozen' nature of the northern regions and the heat and flames of peaks such as Hekla. Yet it is Etna which is declared, 'by the Monuments of all Writers, whether Poets or Historians[,] most famous'.[71]

Perhaps the most authoritative of the texts included in the slim compendium are English translations of Athenius Kircher's first-person accounts of exploring Etna and Vesuvius. Visiting Sicily and Malta in 1638, Kircher was determined 'before all things' to 'examine' Etna; he defined it as 'a great Prototype … of all burning Grounds'.[72] He emphasised that this 'spectacle of Nature' had long attracted visitors to Sicily, asserting that 'you can scarce find an Author either of the Antients, or Moderns, whom the violence of its ferocious nature, hath not drawn into admiration and astonishment'.[73] The Jesuit's description of the 'Hellish Gulph' ('imis barathris') of the crater of the volcano evokes similar sensations of awe, amplified by viewing it as part of a divine Creation:

zur Struktur der barocken Universalwissenschaft am Beispiel Athanasius Kirchers SJ (1602–1680), Berlin 1993; *Athanasias Kircher: The Last Man Who Knew Everything*, ed. P. Findlen, New York 2004; G. Totaro, *L'autobiographie d'Athanasius Kircher: L'écriture d'un jésuite entre vérité et invention au seuil de l'oeuvre*, Berne 2009.

69. *The Vulcano's* (as in n. 67), sig. A2v.

70. Ibid., pp. 2–3.

71. Ibid., p. 7.

72. Ibid., p. 45, and p. 47 for 'imis barathris', translating Kircher (as in n. 68), I, p. 186 ('ante omnia Ætnam … examinandum duxi'; 'magnum … terrarum ardentium … prototypon'). William Hamilton, envoy to Naples in the late 18th century, attached a similar prominence to Etna. It was only after having spent several years in detailed observation of Vesuvius that he felt 'well prepared to visit the most ancient, and perhaps the most considerable Volcano that exists': Hamilton (as in n. 47), p. 56.

73. *The Vulcano's* (as in n. 67), p. 45, translating Kircher (as in n. 68), I, p. 186 ('…vel hoc solo unico spectaculo naturae admirabilis Sicilia. Cum vix Authorem sive ex Antiquis, sive Neotericis reperias, quem non in admirationem & stuporem hujus ferocientis naturae vis traxerit'). The chapter preceding Kircher's account (pp. 38–44) features a compilation of both literary and philosophical ancient references to Etna, including Horace (*Ars poetica*, 565–66), Virgil (*Aeneid*, III.571–77; the same passage is quoted by Brydone; see n. 48) and Lucretius (VI.680–93).

…whosoever desires to behold the power of the only Great and Good God, let him betake himself to these kind of Mountains; and he will be so astonish'd and stupefied with the ineffable effects of the Miracles of Nature, that he will be constrained ever and anon to pronounce, from the most intimate and inmost affection of his heart; *O the depth of the Riches and Wisdom of God! How incomprehensible are thy Judgments, and how unsearchable thy ways, by which thou hast constituted the world!*[74]

The aftermath of Kircher's visit was apocalyptic too. Having toured Sicily, ascended Etna and explored the Liparian islands, he was on his way home when the maritime effects of the 1638 Calabrian earthquakes forced his ship onto land.[75] Ever the natural philosopher, however, Kircher was delighted by the opportunity this offered of 'learning many Secrets of Nature', and of visiting one more volcano: 'the famous *Vesuvius*'.[76] At the lip of the crater, the stench, smell and, ultimately, the eschatological promise of the volcano overwhelmed his thoughts and senses. Viewing what 'is horrible to be expressed, Kircher thought he 'beheld the habitation of Hell', lacking only a horde of devils to make the vision complete. The smoke and fire which 'belch'd forth' from the crater caused him to cough and 'vomit back again' at the volcano.[77] Yet this hellish, multi-sensory experience led him again to immediately praise 'the Riches of the Wisdom and Knowledge of God', precisely because it inspired thoughts of the end of the world:

If thou shewest thy power against the wickedness of mankind in so formidable and portentous Prodigies and Omens of Nature; What shall it be in that last day, wherein the Earth shall be drown'd with the Ire of thy Fury, and the Elements melt with fervent heat?[78]

Here, the volcano becomes an omen, as Kircher explains to his reader that Vesuvius, terrifying and awe-inspiring though it is, is just a small sample of what awaits the earth at the end of days. This is explicitly *not* a negative expectation. For Kircher and his readers, just as for his near-contemporary Burnet, the end of the world was a consummation devoutly to be wished: a terrifying prospect, but one that augured the Second Coming of Christ, the creation of a New Heaven and a New Earth, and, for the pious, eternal life with God. Terrible and desirable, the eschatological end to which volcanoes pointed shared much with the overwhelming painful delight, or delightful pain, which would later be diagnosed by Edmund Burke, in

74. Ibid., p. 49, translating Kircher (as in n. 68), I, p. 187 ('Verbo, qui admirandam Dei Opt. Max. potentiam intueri desiderat, is hujusmodi montes adeat, & naturae miraculorum effectibus ineffabilibus attonitus stupefactusque identidem intimo cordis affectu pronunciare cogetur: *O Altitudo divitiaram & sapientia Dei, quam incomprehensibilia sunt judicia tua, & quam investigabiles viae tuae, quibus Mundum constituisti*' [Romans 11.33]).

75. *The Vulcano's* (as in n. 67), p. 34. For current understandings of this historic seismic event see P. Galli and V. Bosi, 'Catastrophic 1638 Earthquakes in Calabria (Southern Italy): New Insights from Paleoseismological Investigation', *Journal of Geophysical Research: Solid Earth*, 108:B1, 2003.

76. *The Vulcano's* (as in n. 67), p. 34. The passage from which these quotations are taken seems to be a summary, rather than a direct translation, of Kircher (as in n. 68), I, sigs **2v–**4v.

77. Ibid., p. 35, translating Kircher (as in n. 68), I, sig. **6r.

78. *The Vulcano's* (as in n. 67), p. 35, translating Kircher (as in n. 68), I, sig. **6r ('O Altitudo divitiarum sapientiae et scientiae DEI … [Romans 11.33]. Si potentiam tuam tam formidandis Naturae portentis contra praevaricantis humani generis malitiam ostendis, quid erit in illo novissimo die, quo Terra ira furoris tui submersa, elementa calore solventur'). Cf. above, n. 74.

his *Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful* (1757), as characteristic of the sublime.[79]

Of particular interest here, however, is that these seventeenth-century accounts of Etna and Vesuvius demonstrate the same three elements of aesthetics, knowledge and cultural association that we have identified in Brydone's *Tour*; and as in Brydone, they combine and interplay, although here within an earlier intellectual framework. For Burnet, Kircher and Kircher's anonymous translator, just as for Brydone, a crucial element of the experience of awe in the face of the grandeur of nature is knowledge. This knowledge is the result of inductive reasoning and prediction: for the seventeenth-century writers, it is not yet supplemented with experimental observation as it would be for Brydone; but what is crucial for all of them is its potency in intensifying the aesthetic experience of the volcano. The third strand of volcanic engagement, that of 'classic ground', is likewise present in the seventeenth-century accounts—but not in Brydone's sense of offering specific moments of connection to the ancient past in response to particular landscape features. Instead, the earlier writers justify their focus on volcanoes by demonstrating, at length, that the awe-inspiring nature of their topic is not a new perception but has long, long since been recognised.

EXPERIENCE, OBSERVATION AND FABLE: PIETRO BEMBO'S DIALOGUE, AND THE FIRST CENTURY AD *AETNA* POEM

The final two works to be considered here demonstrate once more the interplay between knowing Mount Etna and fully appreciating it as an aesthetic object. They are Pietro Bembo's *De Aetna*, published in 1496, shortly after the humanist's ascent of the volcano; and a Latin poem about the volcano written almost 1500 years earlier. Although separated by so many centuries, there is justification for considering both works together. They are connected, as I hope to demonstrate in this section, by the priority they give to experience and observation. In both texts, to see Etna is to learn about both the volcano itself and the wider workings of the natural world. To learn is to discover what makes nature truly worthy of wonder. Both also engage in complex and nuanced ways with the 'classic ground' of earlier writings and mythological perceptions regarding Etna; and both evoke tension between the more rational and the more fabulous ancient accounts.

Bembo's *De Aetna*, like Brydone's *Tour*, is written as a letter to a friend and one-time travelling companion, Angelo Gabriel. In justifying the need for its publication, Bembo points towards the intense curiosity prompted by their visit to the volcano: 'since you and I returned from Sicily, nearly every day has brought questions about the fires of Etna from people who knew we had investigated them personally with some care'.[80] The answers to these questions are provided in the

79. Burke (as in n. 7), e.g., pp. 59–60. Nicolson (as in n. 5), argued (e.g., p. 393) that the 18th-century development of the sublime marked the transferral of emotions of awe that had previously been reserved as a response to the idea of God onto the natural landscape. I would suggest that the passages explored here indicate that this is a category error: in the 17th century, the awe evoked by the volcanic landscape was inextricably *linked* to the idea of God. See also Duffy (as in n. 1), p. 18.

80. Pietro Bembo, *Lyric Poetry: Etna*, ed. and tr. M. P. Chatfield (I Tatti Renaissance Library), Cambridge

form of a dialogue between Pietro and his father, Bernardo, adding an even greater level of authorial intimacy over and above the framework of the letter to a friend. The conversation is set in the grounds of Noniano, the Bembo country estate, beneath the cooling shade of trees. Pietro's account of his journey to Etna is framed by and interspersed with glimpses into his relationship with his father, and the disjunction between his own scholarly interests and Bernardo's patrician responsibilities.[81]

In the initial stages of the dialogue Bernardo acts as a proxy for the curious reader, asking the very questions which Pietro suggests in his opening passage have beset him since his return home. Bernardo urges his son to 'tell me what truth there is in the widespread reports and written accounts of the flames of Etna … . There is nothing I always enjoy so much as hearing about the marvels of nature.'[82] This introduces a theme in the dialogue: that hearing about nature from someone who has observed its activities first-hand has the same potential to inspire awe as the experience itself. Such slippage between listening and experiencing occurs when Pietro suggests that they walk along the bank by the water while they speak, and Bernardo quips that 'if your flames of Etna reach me', he will at least be able 'to quench them in the stream of his own river'.[83] Pietro responds that the flames are too far away; but if they were to reach Noniano, then the river would be of no help: 'the sea itself has to bow to their will and shrink before their heat'.[84] Bernardo's response sets the tone for the whole volcanic dialogue to come: 'what you say is already hardly believable. Now tell me how that happens.'[85] The truth of Etna is so remarkable that it is worthy of full and immediate inquiry.

The conversation proceeds by slow digressions, with Bernardo worrying about Pietro spending too much time studying (he had apparently applied himself rigorously to classical studies for fourteen months without cessation in Messina before deciding to venture to Sicily), and Pietro reassuring his father that the spiritual and educational 'inheritance' he has received from him is far more valuable than any wealth.[86] After briefly touching on the antiquities of Taormina,

MA 2005, pp. 196–97: 'quam e Sicilia ego, et tu reversi sumus, ut de Aetnae incendiis interrogaremus ab iis, quibus notum est illa nos satis diligenter perspexisse'. Another English translation of the poem is provided by G. D. Williams, *Pietro Bembo on Etna: The Ascent of a Venetian Humanist,* New York 2017, which provides a new parallel translation of the work as part of a monograph that skilfully places Bembo's ascent within its full context, while highlighting the many rhetorical devices at work in his account. Williams enumerates the multiple purposes which the narrative serves: to demonstrate respect to Pietro's father Bernardo and to his various tutors, and to further establish his decision to abandon a patrician life in favour of one of scholarship (p. 15 and chs 3–4).

81. The Bembos, father and son, have been the subject of extensive scholarship. On Bernardo see N. Giannetto, *Bernardo Bembo: umanista e politico veneziano*, Florence 1985; on Pietro see S. Nalezyty, *Pietro Bembo and the Intellectual Pleasures of a Renaissance Writer and Art Collector*, New Haven CT and London 2017, and *Pietro Bembo e l'invenzione del Rinascimento*, ed. G. Beltramini et al., exhib. cat., Venice 2013.

82. Bembo, ed. Chatfield (as in n. 80), pp. 202–03: 'narra mihi quemadmodum ea se habent, quae de Aetnaeis ignibus et feruntur passim et perlegentur … . neque est, quod ego soleam libentius, quam de naturae miraculis audire'.

83. Ibid.: 'ita mihi videbor melius tuas illas flammas Aetnaeas, si mi offenderit, Pluvici mei [i.e., Piovego canal] unda temperaturus'.

84. Ibid.: 'cum [ed. 'cure'] mare ipsum etiam cedat illis volentibus atque earum ardoribus contrahatur'.

85. Ibid.: 'iam plane vix credenda sunt ista quae dicis; verum, qui ita fiat, explana id etiam mihi'.

86. Ibid., pp. 204–05 and 208–15.

Pietro turns to the peak, expounding on the fecundity of its lower reaches and, just as Brydone would do three centuries later, indulging in echoes of classical memory: 'There are lovely scenes here on every side … here it is always springtime … so that one could easily believe that this is the spot where Proserpine was snatched away.[87] Also like Brydone later, Pietro divides the mountain below the summit cones and their fires into three distinctive regions: a fertile lower one, a wooded middle one and a barren upper one.

On reaching the region of fire, Pietro's enthusiasm to experience fully and thus understand the phenomena of Etna overcomes any thoughts of physical risk. Although initially put off by the billowing smoke, he and his companions 'gradually advanced … until we could touch the actual crater with our hands'.[88] They find themselves surrounded by areas of still-molten rock, which occasionally spurt out fire and scorching stones. Far from being deterred, the young men wait for several of these stones to cool so they can pick them up and carry them back to Messina. Pietro acknowledges their foolishness while also seeking to excuse it: 'We thought it would be possible to stand there in safety, and we were led on by our eagerness—or perhaps our greed—to see everything.'[89] Bernardo chides his son for his risk-taking, reminding him of a prominent classical volcanic anecdote: 'But didn't you know that Pliny the Elder died like that, when he was too thorough (I won't say rash) in his investigation of the fires of Vesuvius?'[90] Pietro agrees, but excuses himself and his companions once again on the grounds of the attraction of rational investigation: 'we were so delighted with the spectacle, and filled with such amazement at the novelty of the phenomenon, that none of us gave a thought to himself'.[91] Unlike Brydone later, Bembo offers no set-piece description of the view from the summit, but his experience is no less full of marvel and delight. Importantly, his intense emotional response to Etna is explicitly—I would contend, even more explicitly than in Brydone's case—tied to his natural philosophical desire to catch nature in the act.

The dangerous crater the party had reached was not, however, the actual summit of the mountain, which Pietro explains they were unable to reach due to the quantity of smoke and the strength of the wind on the day of his climb. Instead, hearing serves to replace experiencing, just as it has for Bernardo throughout the dialogue, with Pietro passing on the report of Urbano Bolzanio, whom Pietro says climbed the volcano a few days beforehand, and of whose accuracy he is as sure 'as if I had seen everything myself'.[92] Pietro describes, second-hand, Bolzanio's

87. Ibid., pp. 216–17: 'Hic amoenissima loca circunquaque … hic parata in floribus semper … ut facile quilibet puellam Proserpinam hinc fuisse raptam putet.'

88. Ibid., pp. 222–23: 'paulatim ingressi craterem ipsum tetigimus manu'.

89. Ibid., pp. 224–25: 'Quia cum licere illic nobis tuto consistere putabamus, tum etiam perlustrandi studio vel potius aviditate ferebamur.'

90. Ibid.: 'An nesciebatis Plinium illum maiorem ita occidisse, dum nimium diligentur, ne dicam inconsulte, Veseviana incendia pertentaret?' See Pliny the Younger, *Letters*, VI.16.

91. Ibid.: 'verum tanta nos delectatio illius spectaculi detinebat, tanta rei novitas, tantus invaserat stupor, ut suiipsius iam nemo satis nostrum recorderatur'.

92. Ibid., pp. 226–27: 'quando ea tibi narrari postulas, quibus tamen ego tam accedo ut credam, quam omnino si perspexissem'. Williams (as in n. 80), pp. 85–89, notes that Bembo may have been stretching the truth somewhat in claiming that Bolzanio ascended

experience of the summit blasting out stones, while 'the abyss within could be heard groaning, and the mountain quaked with thunder beneath their feet, with deep shudders so as to strike terror into those who were present'.[93] Volcanic phenomena at this time were generally associated with the movement of winds within the supposed hollow passages of the mountain, and so Pietro expresses surprise that he and his companions heard no such noises on a day when the wind was blowing so hard as to prevent them reaching the summit.[94] This rhetorical move enables Bernardo to take up the role of providing the reader with a rational account of the mountain, explaining patiently to his son that 'there is nothing remarkable in this … . It is not so much a question of which wind is blowing as how it enters the mountain and penetrates into its depths and innermost parts.'[95]

Bernardo's intervention introduces a section of the dialogue which deals closely with several recurrent themes: the intersection of myth, classical knowledge and empirical experience, and the question of whether Etna is truly remarkable in and of itself or merely a particularly prominent example of the wonder that permeates all of Nature. Father and son press each other for answers to their respective questions. Pietro asks Bernardo: 'You think then that Mount Etna draws in the winds, as the lungs draw breath, and these make it sometimes breathe gently and sometimes be more violently roused?'[96] Bernardo says yes—unless his son really thinks there is 'more truth in the legend the poets tell about Typhoeus and Enceladus': that the rumblings and occasional eruptions of Etna are the groans and rolls of a giant trapped beneath its great weight.[97] Pietro, somewhat contrarily, protests: 'There is certainly a lot of truth in the fable';[98] and in turn presses his father to provide an alternative answer to the question of 'how do these fires start, and once started, how have they gone on so long?'[99]

the volcano only a few days before he did: records suggest that, while Bolzanio certainly did climb Etna, he probably cannot be placed in its immediate vicinity in the year 1493. Williams suggests that this distortion instead serves to locate Bembo within the same traditions of naturalistic inquiry and antiquarian travel represented by Bolzanio. See also L. Gualdo Rosa, 'Dalle Fosse (Bolzanio), Urbano', in *Dizionario biografico degli Italiani*, XXXII, Rome 1986, pp. 88–92.

93. Bembo, ed. Chatfield (as in n. 80), pp. 226–27: 'interea ingemere intus cavernas auditas, intremere etiam tonitruis montem sub pedibus magno et formidoloso iis, qui aderant, horrore'.

94. Ibid.

95. Ibid., pp. 226–29: 'neque plane ipsum est mirum. … non enim quam perflet quis, sed quam intret in montem quamque se in cavernas illius inque viscera insinuet, est spectandum.'

96. Ibid., pp. 228–29: 'Intra montem igitur tu, tamquam intra pectus animam, sic accipi ab Aetna ventos putat, quibus illa modo spirat leniter, modo vehementius incitatur?'

97. Ibid.: 'Sane quidem, nisi tamen veriora illa sunt, quae de Typhoeo, deque Encelado poetarum fabulositas concinnavit.' Zeus throwing Typhoeus into Etna is first alluded to by Hesiod, *Theogony*, 839–72. The Gigantomachy is not to be confused with the Titanomachy (a battle between the divine Titans and the Olympian deities whom they preceded, described at length in Hesiod, *Theogony*, 629–735), although Hellenistic and later poets did conflate the two. The location of the Gigantomachy also varies from telling to telling, though it is always set in a volcanic landscape: e.g., Pindar, *Nemean*, 1.67–69, places the battle on the Phlegraean Fields. Pindar and Augustan poets, including Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, 1.151–62, also alluded to the myth, while the 2nd-century AD mythographer Pseudo-Apollodorus, *Bibliotheca*, 1.6.1–3, offered a detailed account of it; see P. R. Hardie, 'Some Themes from Gigantomachy in the "Aeneid"', *Hermes*, CXI, 1983, pp. 311–26. H. Sigurdsson, *Melting the Earth: The History of Ideas on Volcanic Eruptions*, New York and Oxford 1999, pp. 14–16, offers a general overview of Greek and Roman myths relating to Etna, including the Gigantomachy and the alternative vision of Etna as the forge of Hephaestus/Vulcan.

98. Bembo, ed. Chatfield (as in n. 80), pp. 228–29: 'Verissima illa quidem fabella est'.

99. Ibid.: 'ea incendia unde oriantur et orta quomodo perdurent'.

Bernardo's response, explaining the interaction between the winds flowing through the channels of the earth and the 'veins of sulphur' running throughout Etna, echoes both the writings of Lucretius, and the pseudo-Virgilian *Aetna*, to which we will come shortly.[100] Here, Bernardo turns the dynamic of the dialogue on its head by challenging Pietro as to whether there is anything especially remarkable about Etna at all:

> That is how the fires of Etna start: now hear how, once started, they continue. I don't think this should astonish you, as it does most people; I know such vast flames … must always have had an immense source of nourishment. But what is immense or difficult for Nature, the parent and ruler of everything? …When we look at the stars, the sun, the arch of heaven, all the lands and seas, indeed, the entire universe which is more wonderful than anything … are we to see any special marvel in Etna?[101]

He goes on to make clear, with constant recourse to classical authorities informing his brusque rationality, that the volcano fuels itself by eating up both the 'soft sinews' of the earth and the harder rocks around it, but that it goes on burning because 'The earth is always spontaneously prolific and always renewing itself'[102]—unless, he adds, you agree with Pythagoras, who according to Ovid (*Metamorphoses*, xv, 340–41), believed that Etna's fires would not last forever. Throughout these passages, Bernardo turns to classical authors for logical explanations of the phenomena of Etna, but rejects mythological ideas which attach any special significance to the volcano over and above the wonder of nature in general.

Bernardo does not, however, deny the value of personal experience, and invites his son to share what he observed while physically on the mountain: how, he asks, do the floods of fire or lava behave? Pietro, stubbornly, insists on referring to classical myth. Based on the accuracy of Hesiod's description in the *Theogony*, 862–68, of a melting, burning earth, he suspects 'that the Ascraean shepherd had climbed Etna at some time, and taken from it the description which he afterwards applied to the whole earth'.[103] Bernardo appreciates Hesiod's turn of phrase but continues to press for an answer drawn from his son's experience, which Pietro finally provides by describing how the Etnean lavas cool to brittle stone: the newer lavas are harder and darker than the old ones, which crack open with the force of steam below them, fading and crumbling, and that is why there is sand all around the summit.[104]

100. Ibid., pp. 230–31: 'si etiam in sulfuris venas venti furentes inciderint'. Cf. Lucretius, *De rerum natura*, VI.639–702. For the influence of the *Aetna* poem on Bernardo's theory of Etna's fires see Williams (as in n. 80), pp. 253–55.

101. Ibid., pp. 232–33: 'Habes, unde incendia oriantur Aetnae tuae; habe nunc quomodo etiam orta perdurent. In quo quidem nolo ego te illud admirari, quod vulgus solet: magnum esse scilicet tantas flammas … semper habuisse, quo alerentur. Quid est enim magnum ipsi magistrae rerum omnium et parenti naturae? … Qui stellas, qui solem, qui coeli convexa, qui terras omnes ac maria, qui mundum denique ipsum, quo nihil est admirabilius, vel potius extra quem nihil est quod admireris, saepe sine admiratione intuemur, iisdem nobis esse Aetna miraculum potest?'

102. Ibid., pp. 234–35: 'Tellus enim semper foecunda est sui ipsius semperque semet ipsa parturit'.

103. Ibid., pp. 236–37: 'Ex quo sane libet mihi suspicari etiam pastorem illum Ascraeum aliquando Aetnam conscendisse atque inde sibi sumpisse, quod de universa tellure scriptum reliquit'.

104. Ibid., pp. 238–39.

However, Pietro is not to be distracted from his father's challenge, and remains determined to counter Bernardo's scepticism regarding the remarkable nature of Etna. Moving swiftly on from his account of the behaviour of the lava, he elaborates on the physical difficulty of climbing Etna. 'You may find this remarkable to hear about', he tells his father, 'as indeed it is; I have always thought so, but never so much as when I saw it for myself, for no one can judge the size of Etna who has not seen it.'[105] This comment insists not only on the particular wonders of Etna, but also on the idea—somewhat at odds with Pietro's earlier willingness to draw on the testimony of another traveller regarding the summit—that to truly appreciate and understand the volcano, one has to experience it in person. By way of example, he describes the snow on Etna, which, he asserts, is present at the summit all year round. Bernardo protests that, according to Strabo (VI.2.8), snow only settles on Etna in winter, leading Pietro to respond that 'one learns in practice, and experience is as good an authority as Strabo, if he will forgive me saying so. And so you will frequently have to guard against being surprised if some part of my account of Etna disagrees with ancient authors.'[106] He does not go so far as to suggest that the ancient authors were wrong—noting that the mountain has clearly undergone changes over time and that it may well have been less snowy in Strabo's era—but this is nevertheless a clear assertion that there is a need for their statements to be considered alongside the results of current-day empirical observations.

Bembo's *De Aetna* demonstrates clear instances of congruence with the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century texts analysed above. He presents himself as being just as enervated by the experience of ascending Etna as Brydone would some three centuries later. The wonder of the volcano is intensified by the act of observing, experiencing and, simultaneously, seeking to understand it; and one of the ways in which that understanding can be achieved is through reference to the cultural accretion of ancient texts and ideas which figuratively overlay its slopes. Bembo's use of the dialogue form, however, enables him to offer a far more ambiguous vision of Etna than the self-consciously engaging epistolary narrative of Brydone's *Tour*.[107] In this polished, crafted piece, Bembo presents his reader with a number of implicit questions: is Etna truly remarkable? And if it is, can it be truly appreciated through report, or only through personal observation? The youthful voice of Pietro the traveller cannot refrain from suggesting that true appreciation and understanding comes from seeing the mountain for oneself.

105. Ibid., pp. 240–42: 'Magna haec fortasse videbuntur, pater, audienti tibi: magna enim sunt, ut mihi quidem videri solet, verum nusquam adeo ac nobis videntibus fuere: nam Aetna quanta est, nemo quidem scit, qui non videt.'

106. Ibid., pp. 242–43: 'At experientia ita te docet, ususque ipse auctor [Strabo], quod quidem venia illius dixerim, non deterior. Quare illud, mi pater, etiam atque etiam vide, ne quid te moveat, si aliqua ex parte huius nostri de Aetna sermonis cum vetustis scriptoribus dissentimus.'

107. On dialogue as a genre in this period see, e.g., D. Marsh, *The Quattrocento Dialogue: Classical Tradition and Humanist Innovation*, Cambridge MA 1980; V. Cox, *The Renaissance Dialogue: Literary Dialogue in its Social and Political Contexts, Castiglione to Galileo*, Cambridge, 1992; and *Printed Voices: The Renaissance Culture of Dialogue*, ed. D. Heitsch and J.-F. Valée, Toronto 2004. Cox, pp. 47–60, presents Castiglione's 1528 *Il libro del cortegiano* (in which Pietro Bembo appears as an interlocutor) as representative of the 'open' dialogue of the early Cinquecento, which resisted offering definitive answers, in contrast to the more 'monological, magisterial forms' of dialogue which developed later in the century.

Meanwhile the voice of maturity and paternal seniority, Bernardo, gives a privileged position to a select group of classical ideas and authors, whilst also casting doubt on the question of whether Etna is truly marvellous. For the most part, readers are left to make their own choice between the immersive, wondering response of the son and the more restrained rationality of the father.[108] That said, the very fact of the publication of *De Aetna* communicates the implicit message that reading and hearing about the volcano at second-hand are valid and valuable sources of both knowledge and even pleasure.

The conclusion of the dialogue ultimately leaves son and father at fond but significant odds. Pietro recalls his desire, during his ascent of Etna to share with his father the experience of reaching a 'high promontory' ('Altissima … specula') on the side of mountain, atop which was a fair meadow, a curious well of fresh water in the hollow of a broken tree and a fine prospect across the Tyrrhenian sea.[109] He imagines that 'the nymphs of the woods and streams' ('Hamadryas et Nais') collaborated to produce a site of such beauty, and reports that local shepherds have claimed to see Faunus himself playing his pipes nearby.[110] Bernardo gently chides his son against 'the allurements of pleasures' offered by such fantasies and suggests that they return inside, where Pietro's 'pastoral fancies' might dissipate.[111] The dialogue thus ends on an ambiguous note, leaving the reader unsure as to whether fable and myth truly add to the enjoyment of Etna's landscape. This very question is central to the final text to be considered here, written some fourteen centuries before Bembo's account: the anonymous first century AD poem *Aetna*.

The dating, authorship, reception and even text of the *Aetna* seem to stand on ground almost as unstable as the mountain it describes. It is generally thought to predate the AD 79 eruption of Vesuvius, which it does not mention. The earliest surviving reference to the poem is in Suetonius, who credited it to Virgil with the caveat, even then, that the authorship was a matter of debate (*Life of Virgil*, 19). Seneca's Letter 79 invited Lucilius, procurator of Sicily, to climb Etna and return with a report leading to the suggestion, popular from the end of the eighteenth century well into the twentieth, that Lucilius composed the *Aetna* in direct response to this request. Today, the *Aetna* is simply referred to as an anonymous poem.[112]

108. Indeed, the closing words of the text, which see Bernardo retreating to his library and his thoughts ('ille cogitabundus in bibliothecam perrexit'), explicitly invite the reader to likewise weigh up the meaning of the dialogue. Bembo, ed. Chatfield (as in n. 80), pp. 248–49.

109. Bembo (as in n. 80), pp. 244–45.

110. Ibid., pp. 244–47.

111. Ibid., pp. 248–49: 'nam nisi te ita informaris, ut voluptatum illecebris animum impervium geras, non possum dicere quam multae tibi occurrent species earum … procedamus in atrium: nugae autem pastorales istae tuae sub umbris sunt potius et inter arbores, quam intra penates recensendae.'

112. For the date and authorship of the *Aetna* see W. Woodburn Hyde, 'The Volcanic History of Etna', *Geographical Review*, I, 1916, pp. 401–18 (410); *Incerti auctoris Aetna*, ed., introd. and comment. F. R. D. Goodyear, Cambridge 1965, pp. 56–59; F. R. D. Goodyear, 'The 'Aetna': Thought, Antecedents, and Style', in *Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt*, Band 2.32.1, ed. H. Temporini, Berlin 1984, pp. 344–63 (358–59); K. Volk, 'Aetna oder Wie man ein Lehrgedicht schreibt', in *Die Appendix Vergiliana: Pseudepigraphen im literarischen Kontext*, ed. N. Holzberg, Tübingen 2005, pp. 68–90 (69–72); and H. Hine, 'Aetna: A New Translation Based on the Text of F. R. D. Goodyear', *Studies in History and Philosophy of Science*, XLIII, 2012, pp. 316–25 (316).

The surviving text is corrupt, and twentieth-century readings have criticised the poem as contradictory, ill-structured and more praiseworthy for its scientific enthusiasm than its style. Recently, however, greater credit has been given to its crafted nature—with the verse figuratively 'erupting' at key moments, corresponding to the described eruptions of Mount Etna—and its skilful representation of 'poetry as science'.[113] In its interest in rationalising and marvelling at volcanic activity it has been identified with both Lucretius and Longinus.[114] Here, I suggest that it unites the three strands of volcanic engagement evident in later Etnean texts: a sense of the mountain's mythological associations, a fascination with viewing and understanding it, and an admiration for its remarkable physical effects.

Despite the generic identity of the *Aetna* as a work of poetry, its author explicitly rejects 'the deceptions of poets' regarding the volcano.[115] Etna is neither the workshop of Vulcan, nor the home of the Cyclopes and their ringing anvils, nor the result of a war between Jupiter (Zeus) and the Giants.[116] The author acknowledges the enchanting nature of these ideas, especially when poetically expressed, but insists that their tales are outright misrepresentations of the facts ('fallacia').[117] More enchanting by far is to seek to understand the natural realities of Etna, rather than to take pleasure in its myths. The mountain is both marvellous and, as such, worthy of investigation, and, conversely, it is worthy of investigation and thus marvellous:

> Etna provides clear evidence, very close to the truth, of its nature. There, with my guidance, you will not need to search for hidden causes: of their own accord the causes will present themselves to your eyes and compel you to acknowledge them. For there are many, many marvellous things plain to see in that mountain.[118]

Similar language emphasising the remarkable characteristics of Etna reoccurs throughout the poet's lengthy account of its fires ('Jupiter himself, from far away, is

113. See J. T. Welsh, 'How to Read a Volcano', *Transactions of the American Philological Association*, CXLIV, 2014, pp. 97–132, for a revisionist reading of the work as 'poetry as science', and pp. 97–99, esp. n. 3 and n. 10, for a summary of the modern reception of the poem. See also P. Kruschwitz, 'Getting on Top of Things: Form and Meaning in the Pseudo-Vergilian *Aetna*', *Habis*, XLVI, 2015, pp. 75–97, arguing for the deliberate formal complexity of the poem, in spite of its problematic transmission.

114. Porter (as in n. 9), pp. 508–17, notes the debt owed by the *Aetna* poet to Lucretius and characterises the author as belonging to the 'same tradition of Etna-marvelers' as Longinus. Williams (as in n. 80), ch. 1, provides an invaluable analysis of some of the antecedents to the poem, together with extensive textual extracts and translations. See also R. Buxton, 'Mount Etna in the Greco-Roman *imaginaire*: Culture and Liquid Fire', in *Valuing Landscape in Classical Antiquity: Natural Environment and Cultural Imagination*, ed. J. McInerney and I. Sluiter, Leiden and Boston 2016, pp. 25–45 (32–35).

115. *Aetna*, 29: 'principio ne quem capiat fallacia uatem'. I use the translation in Hine (as in n. 112), pp. 316–25; accordingly, my Latin quotations are taken from Goodyear's edition (as in n. 112); for another Latin edition see *Appendix Vergiliana*, ed. W. V. Clausen et al., Oxford 1966, pp. 37–76.

116. *Aetna* (as in n. 112), 30–73.

117. Ibid., 75: 'uatibus ingenium est, hinc audit nobile carmen | plurima pars scenae rerum est fallacia uates'. Hine (as in n. 112), p. 318 n. 31, notes that the text here is 'very uncertain'.

118. *Aetna* (as in n. 112), 177–80: 'Aetna sui manifesta fides et proxima uero est. | non illic duce me occulta scrutabere causas; | occurent oculis ipsae cogentque fateri. | plurima namque patent illi miracula monti'. The translation in *Minor Latin Poets*, tr. J. W. Duff and A. M. Duff, Loeb Classical Library, I, Cambridge MA 1934, gives a slightly different sense to line 176: 'Aetna is the plain and truest proof of its own nature.'

astounded'),[119] but it is not simply the viewing of Etna which inspires awe: it is the understanding it. The poet regards the task of explaining the origins and functions of Etna's fire as an 'immense' undertaking, but one with great rewards,[120] for, rather than 'gazing at marvels with the eyes alone, like animals',[121] the mind will derive 'a divine, joyous pleasure'[122] from analysing the diverse phenomena of the natural world.

Here, the investigation of Etna prompts sensations which recall the response to the natural sublime found in the writings of eighteenth-century travellers such as Brydone. Those sensations are evident too in the closing passages of the poem, which insist on the importance of seeing Etna as well as thinking about it. The author reproaches the crowds who hasten to view the works of humanity—to see the walls of Thebes and the pass of Thermopylae, to visit Athens and Troy—at each step remembering the great battles, glories and deeds of heroism still palpable in the atmosphere of those places.[123] These sights, he protests, offer nothing compared to 'the immense handiwork of the artist Nature';[124] in particular, and there is no spectacle among the works of men to compare to Etna and its flames.[125] Etna is truly worthy of being seen with one's own eyes: not as the product of human skill or labour, but as an example of grand nature.

To this extent, the *Aetna* seems to differ from the other writings we have considered. The poet explicitly rejects the value of cultural associations or 'classic ground'. Not only are past human deeds a poor excuse for visiting such legendary locations as Troy and Thermopylae, but the mythological explanations for volcanism are presented as detracting from a true intellectual-aesthetic appreciation of Etna. The end of the poem, however, problematises that perception. Commenting that 'the mountain has its own amazing legend',[126] the author proceeds to tell the same story as Brydone of the brothers whose love and dedication in carrying their parents to safety caused even the volcanic fires to part around them in sympathy. This inspires the final eruption of wonder from the poet's pen:

> O piety, greatest of blessings, and deservedly the virtue that gives most protection to humankind! The flames were ashamed to touch the pious young men, and parted where they trod. Blessed is that day, blameless is that ground![127]

Twentieth-century critics of the *Aetna* presented these verses as one more illogical contradiction within a corrupt and poorly crafted text. More recent readings, however, have interpreted the author's apparent reversal of his argument as representing, instead, the pinnacle of his poetic intention. As they suggest, this

119. *Aetna* (as in n. 112), 203: 'ipse procul tantos miratur Iuppiter ignes'.

120. Ibid., 223–24: 'inmensus labor est sed fertilis idem, | digna laborantis respondent praemia curis'.

121. Ibid., 224: 'non oculis solum pecudum miranda tueri'.

122. Ibid., 250: 'diuina est animi ac iucunda uoluptas'.

123. Ibid., 570–98.

124. Ibid., 600: 'artificis naturae ingens opus'.

125. Ibid., 601: 'cum tanta humanis phoebus spectacula'. This is the general sense given by Goodyear (as in n. 112), while Hine (as in n. 112), p. 324 n. 111, notes that the line is 'incurably corrupt'.

126. *Aetna* (as in n. 112), 603: 'insequitur miranda tamen sua fabula montem'.

127. Ibid., 633–36: 'et merito pietas homini tutissima uirtus! | erubuere pios iuuenes attingere flammae | et quacumque ferunt illi uestigia cedunt. | felix illa dies, illa est innoxia terra!'

was not just to set aside layers of myth and to explain the phenomena of Etna by reducing the volcano to its rational bones, but to re-clothe it in a new and morally meaningful fable.[128] To set that reading in the taxonomy adopted here, what we see in the *Aetna* is the active construction of 'classic ground'. The capacity for the volcano to inspire awe is indivisible from both its nature as an object of intellectual interest and the layers of culture and memory which have accreted on its slopes.

CONCLUDING REMARKS: CHANGING CONTEXTS, COMMON THREADS

Each of the texts considered in this article is a product of its particular era, shaped by its own particular genre and form. Brydone's *Tour* is a travel narrative, written to sell, with the familiar epistolary format allowing him to engage the reader on a personal level: to 'bring you up' the mountain with him.[129] In many ways, the book is a product of its late eighteenth-century context. Brydone is able to articulate his aesthetic experience of Etna using the explicit vocabulary of the natural sublime which had developed earlier in the century. Moreover, his investigations into the natural phenomena were informed by the specific exploratory apparatus of experimental science: this was an era in which any member of the Royal Society worth their salt would not fail to take a barometer with them up a peak. Classical and historical references come easily to Brydone's pen, and are mined for nuggets of relevant volcanological details. More notably, however, they also underpin flights of literary fancy as 'classic ground' seems to come to life beneath Brydone's very feet on the slopes of Etna.

Kircher and Burnet, a century earlier, produced natural philosophical treatises at a time when investigating nature equated to seeking a better understanding of God. By extension, a sense of awe when confronted with the workings of nature was inextricably bound up with the fear, admiration and impulse to worship prompted by thoughts of the divine. Ancient knowledge was not simply a matter for antiquarian interest: in the late seventeenth century, it still offered valid underpinnings for natural philosophical investigations. Part and parcel of what made Etna worthy of consideration was the long history of human engagement with it.

Bembo's *De Aetna* was written in the era of humanism, by a young man who aspired to a life of scholarship. His choice of the dialogue form allowed Bembo to present a series of contradictions and to leave the assessment of them to the judgement of the reader. The ancient world is very much alive to Bembo, and not merely as a fancy to be evoked over a dram, as in Brydone: instead, the insights of classical authors inform and complement both the author's personal experience of Etna, and his interlocutor's conception of it.

The anonymous, first-century *Aetna* presents a paradox. It is a poem which ostensibly rejects poetic fantasy, an ancient text which rejects even more ancient myth. Part of a wider nexus of Latin texts seeking natural explanations for the

128. Kruschwitz (as in n. 113), p. 91, characterises the account of the *pii fratres* as 'a good kind of myth'; Welsh (as in n. 113), pp. 112–13 and 115–16, suggests that it marks an attempt to equate Etna with positive moral agency or even a form of divinity.

129. Brydone (as in n. 1), I, p. 125.

phenomena of volcanoes, it presents rational investigation into Etna as the trigger for aesthetic pleasure. Nevertheless, it concludes with a fable, reasserting the need for a cultural landscape to imbue nature with moral meaning.

These disparate texts are connected by a cord of three interwoven threads. Each of the authors clearly demonstrates a sense of aesthetic delight, awe or wonder at Mount Etna. This is rooted in an immediate sensory experience of the volcano; but it is also, crucially, intensified by investigation and by a sense of the rich 'classic ground' of Etna's landscape. The precise weave of the cord and expression of its threads is particular to the text concerned and the era in which it was written, but the essential features are consistent, from Brydone's *Tour* all the way back to the ancient *Aetna* poem. Viewed together in this way, they delineate a narrative, not of direct connection between antiquity and the eighteenth century, but rather of engagements with both the classical and the natural world, mediated through intervening traditions.

What makes Brydone's *Tour* 'modern', then, is his access to a specific eighteenth-century rhetoric of sublimity, and his use of experimental methods developed during the Enlightenment. He is not novel in his expression of awe at Etna, his desire to understand it or his appreciation of it as 'classic ground'. In each of these respects, and indeed in the specific combination of them, he is following in the footsteps of his early modern antecedents, whose responses to the volcano in turn echo those of centuries before.

This leads to the chief historiographical intervention intended with this essay. It is tempting, when considering the use of specific aesthetic rhetoric or scientific methods, to make a case for stark change in the Western aesthetics of landscape in the eighteenth century. As I have hoped to show, however, closer reading, which pays attention to the reoccurrence of common threads, attests to a remarkable continuity in the experience of grand nature in relation to Mount Etna and to volcanoes more generally.

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