Changing the Cultural Paradigm: The Royal Society, Vesuvius and the Rise of English Romanticism

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1. Introduction

Scientists, travellers and cultural mediators, the Fellows of the Royal Society have always been fascinated by Mount Vesuvius. Their contributions to the "Philosophical Transactions" (est. 1665) – including the numerous plates in the Hamilton collection[1] – clearly demonstrate that there was a time when this volcano was a real transnational myth uniting Britain and Italy.

In fact, even its geographical location and the political order of Campania were decisive in the development of the Grand Tour: the ancient Appian Way connected Rome and Naples rather easily, and the natural and artistic riches of the region counterbalanced the presence of dangerous *banditti*[2]. Coming from a non-volcanic country, the Fellows and their correspondents accepted to run the risk of crossing the borders of Lazio to live the extraordinary experience of reaching the top of Vesuvius (D'Amore 2015 7-10). Although in 1770 Sir William Hamilton (1730-1803) reported on his extraordinary ascent of Mount Etna (*An Account of a Journey to Mount Etna*), the presence of the highest and most active volcano in Europe both in the Royal Society's documentary archives and in the "Philosophical Transactions" has become significant only in contemporary times.

The textual corpus of this paper provides clear evidence that the Fellows' interest in Vesuvius initially combined with their curiosity about

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the Herculaneum and Pompeii area. Things changed between 1770 and the early 1800s: the new debates on earth sciences not only generated a new wave of learned tourism in the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies, but also fuelled the emerging Romantic mode (Duffy 2023 33). It was in the 1830s, when the "Philosophical Transactions" became a more specialised scientific journal (McDougall-Waters, Moxham and Fyfe 16)[3] that the sublime representations of Vesuvius decreased, while losing also their evocative power. The few articles which are contained in the latest issues of the "Philosophical Transactions A"[4] demonstrate that climate change has considerably affected the approach to this dormant volcano: in 2018, a team of Italian scientists employed cosmic-ray muon radiography to predict its future eruptions (D'Alessadro et al).

This is to say that since its foundation, the Royal Society's journal has disseminated information about its features and destructive force. It is, however, particularly in volumes 1-110, which relate to the years 1665-1820, that we can see how this information intertwined with the main cultural trends of the long eighteenth century: the Fellows' learned letters from Naples referred to the main philosophical ideas on the sublime, which confirm that at least until 1800 there were no differences between the principal areas of study.

There is a great scholarly interest in this specific aspect of British history of ideas, and also in the significance of volcanoes in the passage from early to late modern times. In line with volumes like Sha's *Imagination and Science in Romanticism* (2021), the two sections of this paper will thus diachronically show how the "Transactions" also contributed to the evolution of the very concept of knowledge. The first one, for instance, will ideally take the reader to a world where «science and literature were not clearly distinct» (Sha 238), and the Fellows employed the same visual language as men of letters and philosophers. Proposing Vesuvius as a "hyperobject" during the onset of full-blown Romanticism, the second section, instead, will connect the emergence of geology and volcanology to a more specialised idea of learning, as well as to more suggestive forms of «natural sublime» both in poetry and fiction (Oishi 28).

Made up by scientific articles, verse and different types of cultured prose, this rich intertextual path will give us the chance to discuss not only the role of Vesuvius in the construction of the Romantic canon, but also the changes in the interconnections between the different components of learning in modern England.

2. *The Germs of the Sublime in the Early "Transactions": Focus on Disastrous Campania*

We will thus begin from Restoration times. Evidence of the lack of clear boundaries between humanistic and scientific knowledge can already be found in the early issues of the "Philosophical Transactions" (Girten and Hanlon). Its founder and editor, the eclectic Henry Oldenburg (c. 1618-1677) accepted articles from all areas of study: the majority of them measured the progress of natural philosophy, but it is undeniable that even in the closing decades of the seventeenth century the Fellows of the Royal Society could also learn about the latest literary cases and archaeological findings.

Detailed information about the cultural policies of the first Presidents of the Royal Society can be found in the first volume of Thomas Birch's *The History of the Royal Society* (1756) and more recently in Michael Hunter's *The Royal Society and Its Fellows* (48-50). Apart from the physicist Isaac Newton (PRS 1703-1727), who was adamant in his intent to reinforce the purely scientific character of the Society, his successors in the long eighteenth century[5] also promoted the humanities, benefiting from their wide network of international relations. In the age of important archaeological discoveries, those which were rooted in Italy, particularly in the Kingdom of Naples, were of strategic importance.

Since its foundation, in fact, the Royal Society had been in contact with the most ancient and prestigious academies which were based in the various Italian States[6]: together with their members, though, there were independent researchers or unknown correspondents who had a deep knowledge of classical literature and of philosophy, but who were also willing to provide information about the natural calamities of their times. Taken from the opening issue of the "Philosophical Transactions", the following extract, for instance, recounts an event which had taken place several years earlier, in 1631, and puts an emphasis on the distinctive elements of eruptive phenomena:

> The 6th of December 1631, being in the Gulf of Volo, riding at Anchor, about ten of the Clock that Night, it began to rain Sand and Ashes, and continued till Two of the Clock the Next Morning. It was about two inches thick on the Deck, so that we cast it over board with Shovels, as we did Snow the day before: The quantity of a Bushel we brought home, and presented to several Friends, especially to the Masters in *Trinity House*.

[…] There was no Wind stirring, when these Ashes fell, it did not fall onely in the places, where we were, but likewise in other parts, as Ships were coming from St *John D'Acre* to our Port, they being at that time a hundred Leagues from us. We compared the Ashes together, and found them both one. If you desire to see the Ashes, let me know. (*A Relation of the Raining of Ashes* 377)

Written by a «Mr. *Henry Robinson*» and contained in a letter «subscribed by Capt. *Will Badily*», *A Relation of the Raining of Ashes, in the Archipelago, upon the Eruption of Mount* Vesuvius*, Some Years Ago* shows how «Sand and Ashes» could also be seen in the dark at night. In the following years, the Fellows of the Royal Society learned more about other volcanic materials, which gave them the opportunity to relate the travelling experience to the observation of Nature: the south of Italy thus became popular as an emblem of exoticism and artistic beauty while representing the typical setting of destructive phenomena.

«The dreadful fiery Eruption» which occurred on 16th December 1631 was mentioned not only by the Prince of Cassano in the letter that he addressed to the Royal Society in 1739, but also by Sir William Hamilton in 1795[7]. By this time, the Fellows and their correspondents had learned to approach Vesuvius from a more scientific perspective: interestingly, though, the language that they used was more figurative and emphatic than in the past. This tendency could already be seen in the first decades of the century: writing in 1717, Edward Berkeley, for instance, compared the «odd noises» coming from the «belly» of the volcano to «a sort of Murmuring, Sighing and Throbbing». Further details about the sounds and chromatism of the explosions can be found in the passage below:

The Roaring of the Volcano grew exceeding loud and horrible as we approach'd. I observed a Mixture of Colours in the Cloud over the green, yellow, red and blue; there was likewise a ruddy dismal Light in the Air over that Tract of Land where the burning River flowed; Ashes continually shower'd on us all the way from the Sea-Coast. All which Circumstances, set off and augmented by the Horror and Silence of the Night, made a Scene the most uncommon, and astonishing I ever saw. (*Extract of a Letter of Sir Edw. Berkely from Naples* 708)

«*Communicated by Dr*. John Arbuthnot» on 17th April, this letter shows that both men of science and of letters were irresistibly attracted to the horrific features and the violence of Nature, and that they were gradually anthropomorphising it: in a period when volcanoes were seen as «testimonies

of God's grandeur» – and eruptions were also seen as possible signs of the end of the world (Hollis 33) – the Fellows' letters on Mount Vesuvius became key elements of the «prehistory» of the Romantic sublime (29).

In fact, those which, after a rigorous editorial process, appeared in the "Philosophical Transactions" in the following years, continued to balance scientific observation with personal perceptions. It was 1732 when Nicholas Cyrillus (1661-1714) forwarded the contribution that he had initially addressed to the «Meteorological Diary». His main focus was on the freezing point of water in Naples, yet, he also put an emphasis on the «hollow Rumbling» coming from Vesuvius, on its «great Smoak and Stream of Fire», as well as on the materials which «were driven several Miles like a Shower of Hail» and «frightened away the Birds»[8].

Cyrillus's *An Account of an Extraordinary Eruption of Mount Vesuvius* was the last article on Vesuvius that the "Transactions" accepted to publish before 1739. This was the year when the Fellows first read about the great archaeological discovery of the Roman city of Herculaneum[9]: writing about the excavation activities and the first items which had been found, the Italian correspondent Camillo Paderni (c. 1715-1781) not only depicted the site, but also caused a dramatic increase in learned letters from the Bourbon Kingdom of Naples[10]. At a time when King Charles III of Bourbon (1716-1788) was trying to maintain the excavations secret, the "Philosophical Transactions" contributed to a more liberal circulation of information, thus showing that the city of Naples now represented a key destination in the Grand Tour of Italy (D'Amore 2019).

Although in 1739 the Society's journal published a considerable number of letters on the buried city of Herculaneum, again, three of them were on Vesuvius[11]. They were lengthy and rich in details, but more importantly, they included elements such as «melancholy» and «beauty»: considering that Longinus' *Perì hýpsosus* (*On the Sublime*) was newly translated into English in that same year (Duffy 2023 41)[12] – which emphasised the importance of «formally disrupted verbal devices such as scrambled or disconnected word order» (Fry 11) – we can understand why even these contributions were the product of a unified cultural canon, which incorporated the classics, natural philosophy and a new sensibility.

In a period when the new President of the Royal Society, Sir Hans Sloane (1660-1753), almost reversed the policies of his predecessor, more letters from Vesuvius increased the popularity of the south of Italy and especially of Campania. The Fellows could not but be fascinated by the

account of «an English Gentleman» who was residing in the capital and who had witnessed the 1737 eruption of Vesuvius:

> It was a melancholy Sight, to see the Road full of Numbers of poor Wretches, flying as from *Sodom*. I stopped on the Way, to observe the vast Clouds of Smoak, which was thrown up in a prodigious Column, to an Height not to be guessed at, which, by its gentle Waving and Undulation, was a most beautiful Sight; and when it had mounted so high, that it had lost the Force of the Protrusion, it was carried by the Wind a vast Way;
>
> […] There were many great Flashes of Lightning darted through this Pillar of Smoak, and frequent Discharges as of Cannon or Bombs, which were followed by falling Stars, such as we see from well-made Rockets.
>
> In a little time, by the light of the mountain, […] and the Help of our Torches, we scrambled over very rough Roads, till we got within about a quarter of a Mile of the great Lava or Current: But then l ordered an Halt; for indeed the Scene on all Sides became so stupendous and terrible, that I thought I should make a very foolish Figure, if any Misfortune should happen to us. (*An Abstract of a Letter from an English Gentleman at Naples* 254)

Both this unknown correspondent and the Prince of Cassano considered the eruption an opportunity to provide information about the geomorphological features of the area, while using their knowledge of classical sources. The Prince of Cassano in particular recounted that on that occasion «the explosions continued very loud and frequent», «shooting up very large Stones» «to the Horror of the Beholders». Before giving the complete list of experiments that the Scientific Academy of Naples had carried out on the soil of the volcano, he concluded that the damages caused by the eruption were heavy: all the trees were burnt, «People were terribly affrighted, and many Houses were crushed by the Weight of the Ashes and Stones that fell» (*A Letter from his Excellency Nicolas-Michael d'Aragona, Prince of Cassano…, Containing an Account of the Eruption of Vesuvius in May 1737* 241).

The numerous texts on the sublime which were collected by Andrew Ashfield and Peter de Bolla in 1996 confirm that in this early phase, the debate on this aesthetic concept regarded especially the perception and the description of Nature. John Baillie in *An Essay on the Sublime* (1747), for instance, maintained that it was necessary to go beyond style and

acknowledge that the destructive force of Nature was decisive in man's awareness of its «vastness» and «greatness»[13]: even though academic criticism has rarely investigated the role of learned academies in the formation of the principal cultural trends of modern Britain, it seems undeniable that the Royal Society and the "Philosophical Transactions" contributed to the progress of science, while showing its interconnections with literature and philosophy. It was not until the 1850s, for instance, that the mathematician D.H. Cruttenden contended that a particular «subject» may «be presented so as to give a Sublime impression of it», but «[t]he language should be strong, concise and simple» (*The Philosophy of Language; or, Language as an Exact Science*… 452).

Considering the south of Italy as the ideal setting both for scientific observation and literary-artistic investigation, the Fellows bombarded their readers with letters on the huge archaeological site of Herculaneum and the disastrous events that Vesuvius was causing. In 1752, one of their correspondents wrote not only about the trees of the area, which were «loaded with fruit» and «float[ed] upon» a true «river of fire», but also about the «poor» Neapolitans «crying and lamenting their irreparable losses» (*An Account of the Eruption of Mount Vesuvius in Oct. 1751* 411). In 1761, Sir Francis Haskins Eyles Styles FRS (d. 1762) described the «splendid and glorious appearance» of the volcano during its new eruption:

> The mountain, which was quiet in the morning, with scarce any visible smoke, threw up on a sudden, about noon, a vast column of black smoke, which rose to a very considerable height; and, before it had diffused itself, made a splendid and glorious appearance, as the sun, which was then shining, gilded the superior part of it; but soon after, it dispersed, and covered all the mountain, and a great portion of the sky in that quarter. […]
>
> Mr. Lowther, and his companion Mr. Watson, were at the mountain, when the smoke broke out at the summit, and had almost climbed its height; but were fortunately to the windward of it, or they must have been destroyed. The noise, they say, was shocking to them, and the stones thrown up verv alarming. Their guides fled first, and they after them; and they have escaped all harm, but the fatigue. (*An Account of an Eruption of Mount Vesuvius* 411)

3. Vesuvius as a Romantic "Hyperobject": From Scientific Investigation to Literary Appropriation

Putting an emphasis on the shock and sense of danger which finally compelled «Mr. Lowther» and his companion to return to Naples, Haskins Eyles Styles symbolically concluded an important phase in the evolution of the "Transactions" on Vesuvius. From the late 1600s to the mid-eighteenth century, as we have seen, the volcano had been not only at the heart of learned Britons' curiosity and close observation, but also of the «prehistory» of the sublime. In the following decades, the correspondents' descriptions became increasingly colourful and picturesque, which proves that even the early phases of Romanticism were marked by a fruitful interchange between the world of science and that of letters.

Edmund Burke's *Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1757) had already linked «the aesthetics of the sublime and the science of natural wonders» (Oishi 28). In order to give their readers new evidence of the grandeur of volcanic events and have an even stronger cultural impact, the Royal Society availed itself of one of its most skilled and charismatic Fellows: Sir William Hamilton, the British Ambassador to the Kingdom of Naples.

A passionate volcanologist and collector of antiquities, he had a prominent role in this part of the process, proposing first Vesuvius and then Etna as icons of the pre-Romantic combination of terror and beauty (Stone 115): the Fellows could not but appreciate his detailed accounts and beautiful illustrations of the new series of eruptions of Vesuvius. Indeed, «little more than ten years after [Burke] had elaborated the notion of the Sublime, [the volcano]» was regularly erupting: it was hardly surprising that «the extremes of fire and ice», as well as of «turbulence and stillness» (Darley 97-98) would be at the heart of Hamilton's research and writing activities.

His letters were published with no content or stylistic modifications from 1767 to 1795. The first one refers to the eruption of September 1765, when he was in the company of the French astronomer Jérôme Lalande (1732-1807) and noticed that the crater was giving off more smoke than usual. Interestingly, though, his focus was also on volcanic materials: salts in particular were of different colours, «deep yellow, orange, silver and black». He could not believe that local chemists had never analysed them; the following year, he informed the Royal Society that he had just sent a complete set of those materials to the British Museum:

It is very extraordinary, that I cannot find, that any chemist here has ever been at the trouble of analyzing the productions of Vesuvius. The deep yellow, or orange-color salts, of which there are two bottles, I fetched out of the very crater of the mountain, in a crevice that was indeed very hot. It seems to me to be powerful, as it turns silver black in an instant, but has no effect upon gold. If your lordship pleases, I will send you by another opportunity specimens of the sulphurs and salts of the Solfa terra, which seem to be very different from these. (*Two Letters from the Hon. William Hamilton…* 199-200)

The reason why this first piece of correspondence is important is that it gives evidence both of Hamilton's scientific network[14] and of his interest in the area which surrounded the volcano. He referred to the «Solfa terra» [*sic*], which represented the starting point of new important ventures: in 1776, *Campi Phlaegraei* contained the outstanding results of his long observation activity and expressed his love of art. Before him, Giuseppe Mecatti's *Osservazioni che si son fatte sul Vesuvio* (1754) had incorporated similar ekphrastic descriptions (Cocco 194), but Pietro Fabris's stunning engravings – with their bright and contrasting colours – not only became popular in Britain and in the rest of Europe, but were also included in the Royal Society's collections (Cheetam; Andrews).

Hamilton continued to correspond with the Royal Society until the end of the century. The letter that he addressed to the "Philosophical Transactions" in 1780 clearly shows that his language was increasingly visual and that he employed epithets like «formidable», «alarming» and especially «sublime». That year, he had reached the top of the volcano for the 58th time and, as he wrote, he had been impressed by the «red-hot, transparent and liquid» current of lava, «interrupting its splendid brightness here and there by patches of the darkest hue»:

The late eruption of Mount Vesuvius was of so singular a nature, so very violent and alarming, that it necessarily attracted the attention of every one, not only in its immediate neighbourhood, but for many miles, around.

[…] That which followed the next evening was surely much more formidable and alarming; but this was more beautiful and sublime than even the moll lively imagination can paint to itself. This great explosion did not last above eight or ten minutes, after which Vesuvius was totally eclipsed by the dark clouds, and there fell a heavy shower of rain. (*An Account of an Eruption of Mount Vesuvius, Which Happened in August, 1779* 42, 54)

He addressed his last report to the President of the Royal Society, Sir Joseph Banks (1743-1820), precisely in 1795. After describing the strong earthquake that he had witnessed to – also the horrid noises and huge stones coming from the new mouths of the volcano – he emphasised the chromatism of what he defined as a «fiery scene». Interestingly, on this last occasion, he wanted to show not only the horror, but also the admiration that he felt for such «a great operation of Nature»:

> It is impossible that any description can give an idea of this fiery scene, or of the horrid noises that attended this great operation of nature. It was a mixture of the loudest thunder, with incessant reports, like those from a numerous heavy artillery, accompanied by a continued hollow murmur, like that of the roaring of the ocean during a violent storm; and added to these was another blowing noise, like that of the going up of a large flight of sky-rockets, and which brought to my mind also that noise which is produced by the action of the enormous bellows on the furnace of the Carron iron foundery in Scotland, and which it perfectly resembled. (*An Account of the Late Eruption of Mount Vesuvius* 78-79)

Mixing facts and fiction, Susan Sontag in her biography of Hamilton, *The Volcano Lover: A Romance* (1992), confirms that in the 1770s and in the 1780s, the Ambassador largely contributed to the popularity of Vesuvius and of the south of Italy (Sontag 23-26). A "hyperobject"[15] in Romantic times, Vesuvius in particular represented the "vastness" of Nature, as well as the desires and the anxieties of an entire generation.

Hamilton died in 1803, but his fame as a geologist remained unparalleled for a long time. The main scientific circles had recognised him as the "Pliny" of contemporary times, his letters to the Royal Society had been translated into many languages, and his tracts had played a crucial role in the formation of the new generation of natural scientists. Yet, a new phase was about to start: in 1808 Friedrich von Humboldt (1767-1835) published *Voyage de Humboldt et Bonpland*, which laid the foundation of geology, meteorology and volcanology; in 1815 the eruption of Mount Tambora in Indonesia was large enough to entice study a century later. Interestingly, also key figures such as Lord Byron and the Shelleys were heavily influenced by the consequences of such a catastrophic event (Higgins 55-108).

Science was thus continuing to progress – also creating new and more specialised branches of learning – but in this new phase, men and women of letters considered even those early research outcomes as important sources

of inspiration. In this sense, the issues that "Philosophical Transactions" dedicated to Vesuvius greatly encouraged not only the elaboration of the «tropes of ascent» and of «depth» which were typical of Romanticism (Oishi 28), but also a new way of representing the outer world.

In fact, at a time when the Grand Tour fashion was in full swing, the Fellows of the Royal Society continued to be interested in the Campanian volcano. The mineralogist James Smithson (1765-1829), for instance, wrote *On the Saline Substance from Mount Vesuvius* in 1813; in 1815 and 1828 Sir Humphrey Davy (1778-1829) – the new President of the Royal Society who was close to S.T. Coleridge – chose the Society's journal to share the results of his scientific observations. Apart from the fact that on 24th January 1827 the lava appeared «nearly white hot through a chasm near the place where it flowed from the mountain» (*On the Phaenomena of Volcanoes* 242), he discussed the theory of volcanoes focusing in particular on his ignition and combustion experiments.

Seth Reno in *Early Anthropocene Literature in Britain, 1750-1884* (2020) has given much evidence that scientists like Smithson and Davy – also Luke Howard (1772-1884) – offered a significant contribution to the shaping of the volcanic-industrial tradition in Romantic times: while science now demonstrated that factory emissions had atmospheric effects similar to those of eruptions, English literature promptly responded associating volcanic imagery to the readers' contrasting feelings towards social and political unrest, as well as to the fear of technological progress (Reno 75). Starting at the time when Hamilton was still operating in Naples, the process had already involved important figures such as the novelist William Beckford (1760-1844) – who was always haunted by the majestic and yet scary image of Vesuvius – and the artist John Robert Cozen (1752-1797) (Amstutz 184-185)[16]. Paintings like *View of Vesuvius* (1782) or *Vesuvius and Somma from the Mole at Naples* (n.d.), which are part of the latter's production, later inspired William Turner (1775-1851) and Joseph Wright of Derby (1734-1797) (Darley 82-83).

There is clear textual proof of the main Romantic authors' attraction to the features and destructive power of Vesuvius: on his visit to Naples in December 1818, Percy Bysshe Shelley described it as «after the glaciers [of the Alps] the most impressive expression of the energies of the nature «he» ever saw» (Qtd in Duffy 2020); a few years later, in 1822, Lord Byron – who had been elected a Fellow of the Royal Society in 1816 – overtly mentioned it in his correspondence with Thomas Moore[17]. Although the poet

never wanted to climb up Vesuvius as he considered it «hackneyed» (Nolta 109), in the following year, when he published *Don Juan*, he intertwined his verse with volcanic imagery: «I hate to hunt down a tired Metaphor – / So let the often-used Volcano go; / Poor thing! How frequently by me and others / It hath been stirred up, till its Smoke quite smothers» (*Don Juan*, XIII, vv. 285-258).

Further references to the majestic beauty of Vesuvius can be found in Mary Shelley's *The Heir of Mondolfo*, which appeared posthumously in 1877. A late example of gothic fiction, it revives the experience that she had lived with Percy Bysshe when they had reached the rim of the volcano for the first time. As Charlotte Gordon writes in *Romantic Outlaws*, she may have left only a few lines about it (75), but the following passage significantly shows that she wanted to represent Vesuvius in winter while creating a perfect correspondence between the protagonist, Ludovico, and all natural elements:

> The plain at the foot of Vesuvius and its neighboring hills was stripped bare by winter; the full stream rushed impetuously from the hills; and there was mingled with it the baying of the dogs and the cries of the hunters; the sea, dark under a lowering sky, made a melancholy dirge as its waves broke on the shore; Vesuvius groaned heavily, and the birds answered it by wailing shrieks; a heavy sirocco hung upon the atmosphere, rendering it damp and cold. This wind seems at once to excite and depress the human mind: it excites it to thought, but colors those thoughts, as it does the sky, with black. Ludovico felt this; but he tried to surmount the natural feelings with which the ungenial air filled him. *(The Heir of Mondolpho* 27)

Diversifying language codes and ways of representation, scientists, writers and artists left few or no traces of the studies or debates on the catastrophic eruption which occurred in 1822. The anonymous correspondent of the "The Gentleman's Magazine" confirms that «a more grand spectacle there could not be», and that «the majestic stream of lava» that he had seen was «1483 feet in breadth» (*Account of the Eruptions of Mount Vesuvius* 394): it was only in the early 1830s that Charles Lyell (1797-1875), the father of modern geology, analysed the disastrous event in his seminal tract *Principles of Geology*. After mentioning Sir William Hamilton and several other scientists who had researched on the most popular volcano in the world before him, he wrote about the violent eruptions which occurred «during the space of more than twenty days» and especially about the depth of the «tremendous abyss» of the crater[18].

Both Cavaliere Monticelli (1759-1845), Foreign Associate of the Geological Society, and Charles Daubeny (1795-1867), Fellow of the Royal Society, reported the 1834 eruption and the experience of descending «into the interior of the crater». Again, the two scientists focused on the considerable lava currents and the violent concussion which «spread devastation» all over the surrounding area. More details can be found in the short extract below, which show that considering Daubeny's clearly scientific focus, there was now only a slight echo of the language of the sublime:

> The lava was flowing from an aperture about one hundred yards below it, being apparently forced out by elastic fluids with a noise like that made by the steam disengaged from a pressure engine: it rose, perfectly fluid, forming a stream of from five to six feet in diameter, and immediately fell, as a cataract, into a chasm about forty feet below, where it was lost under a kind of bridge formed of cooled lava; but it re-appeared sixty or seventy yards further down. Where it issued from the mountain, it was nearly white hot, and exhibited an appearance similar to that which is shown when a pole of wood is introduced into the melted copper of a foundry, its surface appearing in violent agitation, large bubbles rising, which in bursting produced a white smoke; but the lava became of a red colour, though still visible in the sunshine, where it issued from under the bridge. The force with which it flowed was so great, that the strength of the guide, a very stout young man, was insufficient to keep a long iron rod in the current. (*Some Account of the Eruption of Vesuvius Which Occurred in the Month of August 1834* 154)

4. New Developments and Conclusions

Detailed information about this new devastating eruption was promptly given by several London newspapers, again, "The Gentleman's Magazine", but also "The Examiner" and "The Times", which fuelled interest in Edward Bulwer Lytton's *The Last Days of Pompeii* (1834) (Groth 17-19). Yet, the last article which the "Transactions" dedicated specifically to Vesuvius in late modern times was written by Dr. Johnston-Lavis (1856-1914) in 1886. There were no traces of the figurative language that scientists used to employ in the past, but the reason why *The Relationship of the Activity of Vesuvius to Certain Meteorological and Astronomical Phenomena* is worth mentioning is that for the first time it explored «the relations between the sudden changes in atmospheric pressure and the variations in the volcanic activity» (248).

More scientific contributions on this particular topic appeared in the Royal Society's journals in the following decades. Considering that Vesuvius last erupted in 1944, scholars focused on geologists and mineralogists – William Hamilton, Woronzow Greig (1805-1865) and Robert Angus Smith (1817-1884), to name but a few – who devoted a significant part of their work to Italy and its volcanoes. Interestingly, in these cases, they proposed the results of their studies to "Notes and Records of the Royal Society" and "Proceedings of the Royal Society of London". The Society's on line archive includes 20 more articles with a clear historical focus, which appeared in these two journals between 1949 and 1999.

This is to say that «the most famous volcano in the world», as Gillian Darley defined it in her latest monograph, Vesuvius has captivated men and women of intellect since early modern times. The letters that the Royal Society accepted to publish in the long eighteenth century represent a harmonic combination of research-based data, stupor and horror, which contributed to the progress of science while paving the way to the Romantic mode. More importantly, though, they show that it was in the first half of 1800 that the emergence of new disciplines like geology and volcanology encouraged the elaboration of new forms of «natural sublime» (Oishi 28), as well as powerful volcanic-industrial images both in poetry and in fiction (Reno 75).

The limitations in the Fellows' writings – and in the rest of the "Transactions" on Vesuvius – are, however, clear: 19 appeared between 1665 and 1795, while only 9 date to the years 1813-2022. Despite the fact that they do not contain any information about important eruptions such as those of 1822 and 1944, they represent a rich textual resource which should be valued also in the field of the humanities. Linking different areas of knowledge and significantly contributing to the history of ideas, they have showed that it is possible to go beyond scientific barriers, while making Britain and Italy closer.

Note, Notes, Anmerkungen, Notes

1 The Royal Society houses an important collection of plates which were collected by Sir William Hamilton at the time when he was residing in Naples. Search The Royal Society Picture Library at https://pictures.royalsociety.org/results (Accessed 27 November 2023). See also Andrews 7-9.

2 See Wright 149: «The road is shamefully bad that leads to this great and fine City: But it is remote from its Sovereign, always govern'd by Viceroys, who perhaps have not thought the care of the Roads to be of so much Consequence, as to reserve their Notice. The most pleasant Situation of Naples, with its large and delightful Bay, have been so fully described by Authors extant among us, that it wou'd be superfluous for me to attempt it».

3 Apart from the above-mentioned celebrative publication, consider also the section entitled *"Philosophical Transactions" in the Nineteenth Century* at https://arts.st-andrews.ac.uk/philosophicaltransactions/brief-history-of-phil-trans/phil-trans-in-19th-century/ (Accessed 27 November 2023).

4 In 1887, "Philosophical Transactions" was divided into two parts: "Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society A: Mathematical, Physical and Engineering Sciences" and "Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society B: Biological Sciences". Today they continue to publish themed issues and discussion meeting issues, while individual research articles appear in "Proceedings of the Royal Society".

5 They were Sir Hans Sloane, 1st Baronet (1727-1741), Martin Folkes (1741-1752), George Parker, 2nd Earl of Macclesfield (1752-1764), James Douglas, 14th Earl of Morton (1764-1768), James Barrow (1768), James West (1768-1772), Sir James Burrow (1772), Sir John Pringle (1772-1778) and Sir Joseph Banks (1778-1820).

6 We will only mention the Accademia della Crusca (1583–), the Accademia dei Lincei (1603–), that of Cimento and that of the Apatisti (1635-1783). For further details, see Boas Hall 1982; and D'Amore 2019, 48.

7 Here we refer to *A letter from his Excellency Nicholas-Michael d'Aragona, Prince of Cassano, and F.R.S. to the President of the Royal Society, containing an account of the eruption of Vesuvius in May 1737…*, "Philosophical Transactions" 41 (1739): 237-252; and *An Account of the Late Eruption of Mount Vesuvius. In a Letter from the Right Honourable Sir William Hamilton,*

K.B.F.R.S. to Sir Joseph Banks, Bart. P. R. S., "Philosophical Transactions" 85 (1795): 73-116.

8 See N. Cyrillus, *An Account of an Extraordinary Eruption of Mount Vesuvius*, "Philosophical Transactions" 37 (1732): 336: «8. 40: o.S. 3 Cloudy Weather; strong South Wind. Vesuvius sent forth a great Smoak and Stream of Fire, with hollow Rumbling. 14. 47: o. N. 2 In the Evening after Eight o'Clock the Fire arose to a vast Height, and threw huge Stones to almost half the perpendicular Height of the Mountain. Pumice Stones red hot of two or more Ounces Weight, were driven several Miles like a Shower of Hail, and frightned away the Birds».

9 «Communicated by Sir *William Sloane*» (1696-1767), a Fellow of the Royal Society, in 1739, *An Account of the Remains of a City Under-Ground, Near Naples* was the first that appeared in the "Philosophical Transactions" in the eighteenth century.

10 Camillo Paderni was a reputable Roman painter who helped Charles III to set up the Royal Museum of Portici after Niccolò Marcello Venuti (1700-1755) abandoned the Kingdom. He was officially in charge of it as the Royal Keeper from 1751-1781. His letters to the "Philosophical Transactions" aroused the curiosity of learned Britons, which contributed to making Naples a key destination of the Grand Tour. See D'Amore 2017, 118-119.

11 See D'Amore 2017. The Addendum to chapter 5, which includes the list of all the articles on Italy which appeared in the "Philosophical Transactions" in 1665-1800, is on pages 140-145.

12 John Hall (1627-1656) published the first English translation of Longinus' work in 1652, which was followed by Leonard Welsted's in 1712. See also Fry, 12; and Lazarus, 193.

13 See Baillie's *On the Sublime* as it appears in Ashfield and de Bolla on p. 88: «Few are so insensible, as not to be struck even at first view with what is truly sublime; and every person upon seeing a great object is affected with something which as it were extends his very being, and expands it to a kind of immensity. Thus in viewing the heaven, how is the soul elevated; and stretching itself to larger scenes and more extended prospects, in a noble enthusiasm of grandeur quits the narrow earth, darts from planet to planet, and takes in worlds at one view! Hence comes the name of the sublime to every thing which thus arises the mind to fits of greatness, and disposes it to soar above her mother earth; hence arises that exultation and pride which the mind ever feels from the consciousness of its own vastness – that object can only be justly called the sublime, which in some degrees disposes the mind to this enlargement of itself, and gives her a lofty conception of her own powers».

14 At a later stage, he also mentioned the alpinist and scientist H.B. De Saussure (1740-1799) in *Account of the Effects of a Thunder-Storm, on the 15th of March 1773, upon the House of Lord Tylney at Naples…* on page 325.

15 Here we refer to Morton's idea of hyperobjects. Apart from his 2013 seminal monograph, see also his *Poisoned Ground: Art and Philosophy in the Time of Hyperobjects* 41-43.

16 See also Cian Duffy, *Vesuvius*, "ERA," 3 April 2020, http://www.euromanticism.org/mount-vesuvius/#more-739) (Accessed 11/09/2023)

17 Here we refer to Byron's letter to Thomas Moore on 10th February 1815, which can be found in Moore, 436.

18 See Lyell, 359: «Between the end of the eighteenth century and the year 1822, the great crater of Vesuvius had been gradually filled by lava boiling up from below, and by scoriæ falling from the explosions of minor mouths which were formed at intervals on its bottom and sides. […] But this state of things was totally changed by the eruption of October, 1822, when violent explosions, during the space of more than twenty days, broke up and threw out all this accumulated mass, so as to leave an immense gulf or chasm, of an irregular, but somewhat elliptical shape, about three miles in circumference when measured along the very sinuous and irregular line of its extreme margin, but somewhat less than three quarters of a mile in its longest diameter, which was directed from N. E. to S.W.»

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