ITALIENISCHE REISE (JOURNEY TO ITALY)

Johann Wolfgang Goethe

Analysis by Francesco De Sorbo

Travelogue, Diary, Memoir, Letter

J. W. Goethe’s travelogue *Italienische Reise* (1816-17) chronicles the author's stay in Italy from 1786 to 1788, during which he visited the volcanic sites of Campania. His descriptions of Mt. Vesuvius combine scientific observation with philosophical reflection. In this work, the volcano emerges as both a dangerous entity and a catalyst for aesthetic meditation.

Year of Publication	1816
Publication Place	Unspecified
Editor	Unspecified
Entity	Mt. Vesuvius

GEOLOGICAL ANALYSIS

Volcanic eruption Mt. Vesuvius

REAL EVENT

Time	1787
Location	Campania Italy
Coordinates	40.821360, 14.426208
Impacted Areas	Mountain's slopes
Base/Complex	Volcanic complex Somma-Vesuvius

Typology

Other

"Goethe during his ascent, may have seen spectacular flow features like breaks in the slope due to lava overflowing artificial walls, cracks or fractures, folds, lava blocks, ridges, lava levees, channelled flows, flow lobes and toe-like flows" (Coratza and Panizza 519)

Effusive

"aa lava" (De Lucia "Goethe on Vesuvius")

Volcano/Eruption Typology	Stratovolcano "It is classified as a stratovolcano because the edifice is composed of alternating strata of lava and pyroclastic deposits, due to effusive and explosive eruptions, respectively" (Aucelli, Brancaccio and Cinque 389)
Anthropization Level	Towns “its piedmont belt hosts an almost uninterrupted series of towns totalling over 600,000 inhabitants” (Aucelli, Brancaccio and Cinque 390) Huts: The Hermit's Hut (De Maddalena, "Goethe sul Vesuvio") Cities: Naples

Volcanic eruption Campi flegrei

REAL EVENT

Time	1787
Location	Campania Italy
Coordinates	40.826865, 14.140434
Impacted Areas	Agnano, Pozzuoli, Monte nuovo, Astroni
Base/Complex	Campanian volcanic arc
Typology	Other Secondary effects: Bradyseism (Costa et al. 7), Fumaroles (Aucelli, Brancaccio e Cinque 396), Mofetes (Costa et al. 5)
Volcano/Eruption Typology	Caldera "The upper half of the ~ 13 km-diameter collapse structure is exposed, while the lower half is submerged beneath Pozzuoli Bay and the Tyrrhenian Sea" (Costa et al. 3)
Anthropization Level	Towns "Agnano and Astroni (De Lucia "Goethe on Vesuvius")

Volcanic eruption Vesuv / Mt. Vesuvius

LITERARY EVENT

Time	1787
Location	Campania Italy
Coordinates	40.821360, 14.426208
Impacted Areas	The volcanic edifice and its base
Emphasis Phase	Disaster (phenomenal and social dynamics)

Base/Complex	Volcanic complex Somma-Vesuvius
Volcanic Risk Ref.	Referenced
Typology	Emission Of Lava, Gases, Lapilli, Emission Of Pumice Stones
Volcano/Eruption Typology	Stratovolcano
Anthropization Level	Huts, Houses, Country Houses, Churches, Streets, Squares, Towns, Cities, Cultural Heritage Sites, Agriculture Areas
Ecological Impacts	Changes In The Volcano's Shape

INDIVIDUAL REACTIONS & AFFECTS

Attitudes

Name	Johann Wolfgang Von Goethe
Age	28
Gender	Man
Native Place	Frankfurt Am Main
Nationality	German
Reactions	Anxiety, Fascination, Wonder, Awareness, Curiosity, Caution

Name	Johann Heinrich Wilhelm Tischbein
Age	26
Gender	Man
Native Place	Heina (kloster)
Nationality	German
Reactions	Anxiety, Malaise, Awareness, Avoidance, Disregard

Name	Der Betagte Führer
Gender	Man
Reactions	Calm, Trust, Awareness

Reactions

Name	Johann Wolfgang Von Goethe
Age	28
Gender	Man
Native Place	Frankfurt Am Main
Nationality	German
Reactions	Euphoria, Fascination, Curiosity, Wonder, Terror

COLLECTIVE REACTIONS & AFFECTS

Attitudes

Name	The population
Reactions	Acceptance, Disregard

Affects/Reactions

Name	The crowd
Reactions	Euphoria, Curiosity, Wonder, Fascination

LINGUISTIC & STYLISTIC ANALYSIS

Keywords	"Vesuv" 'Vesuvius' (Goethe 163; My Trans.) "Paradies" 'Paradise' (164; My Trans.) “Lava” (192) "Neapel" (164) "Schauspiel" 'Spectacle' (310; My Trans.)
Metaphors	“dieses Ungetüm" 'the monster' (Goethe 173; my trans.) “das glühende Gerolle" 'the glowing rubble' (173; my trans.) "Schlundes" 'abyss' (173; my trans.) "einen Text vor uns" 'a text before us' (309; my trans.)
Similes	"ruhig fortfließt wie ein Mühlbach" 'running peacefully like mill brook' (Goethe 192; my trans.)
Motifs, Topoi, Mythologemes	Locus Amoenus, Hell, Ruins
Syntax	Unconventional Position
Punctuation	No Peculiarities
Morphology	Preference For Nouns Adjectives

GEOLOGICAL OBSERVATIONS AND AESTHETIC REFLECTIONS IN J. W. GOETHE’S *ITALIENISCHE REISE*

1. INTRODUCTION

Goethe's *Italienische Reise* (*Italian Journey*) presents a unique fusion of scientific observations and aesthetic experience through the author's profound engagement with Mount Vesuvius. This aspect reveals what might be termed Goethe's "Vulkanweh": an irresistible longing for volcanic phenomena that transcends mere touristic curiosity. Indeed, Goethe's visits to volcanic sites demonstrate a progressive deepening of both geological understanding and poetic imagination. His systematic documentation of geological features operates alongside his rich figurative language and metaphorical descriptions to create a personal approach to understanding and representing the volcano.

Italian Journey constitutes a literary travelogue that chronicles the author's stay in Italy from 1786 to 1788. Although structured as a diary, the work's refined literary style reveals a more sophisticated compositional enterprise. Goethe's diary synthesises personal correspondence and retrospective observations, alongside philosophical and scientific meditations. Just as his writing transcends the conventions of literary genres, Goethe's journey surpasses the conventional aristocratic tradition of the *Grand Tour*. In other words, his travelogue moves beyond superficial cultural consumption. His precipitous flight to Italy was indeed conceived as a response to a period of profound artistic crisis, following the publication of *Götz von Berlichingen* (1773) and *Die Leiden des jungen Werther* (1774). On a deeper level, though, Goethe ascribes the reasons behind his travels to the fulfilment of "ein unwiderstehliches Bedürfnis" 'an irresistible need' (Goethe 110; *my trans.*), "um mich an den Gegenständen kennen zu lernen" 'to discover myself in the objects I see' (37; *my trans.*).

Among the many 'objects' Goethe encountered in Italy, Vesuvius holds a privileged position in the *Italian Journey*, and this prominence can be attributed to several factors. On the one hand, Goethe's excursions on Mt. Vesuvius mirrored those of his father, who climbed the mountain during his fifteen-day sojourn in Naples in 1740 (Canfora 57), as well as those undertaken by many other European intellectuals and wealthy figures. In this light, Goethe's visits to Vesuvius and the Phlegraean Fields can be interpreted as one of the earliest examples of 'geotourism'. According to Coratza and Panizza (2017), Goethe's diary shows "examples of landscape-scale analysis, where an appreciation of interactions between landscape compartments, sense of place, appreciation of diversity and difference, and associated insights into human relationships are highlighted" (521). On the other hand, it can be argued that Goethe's volcanological interests were not solely motivated by touristic or cultural concerns such as the cult of classical ruins. His fascination was significantly enhanced by the high volcanic activity of Mt. Vesuvius during his time. Indeed, after its reactivation in 1631, Vesuvius demonstrated a pattern of regular eruptive activity that proved advantageous for observation. The volcano possessed a distinctive advantage over other members of its volcanic family: its strategic location in what was considered Europe's most spectacular geographic setting, where it stood prominently as the sole active volcano remaining on the European continent (Pyle 10). Consequently, during his ascents to the volcano, Goethe may have easily witnessed "spectacular flow features like breaks in the slope due to lava overflowing artificial walls, cracks or fractures, folds, lava blocks, ridges, lava levees, channelled flows, flow lobes and toe-like flows" (Coratza and Panizza 519).

2. UNDERSTANDING "VULKANWEH": GOETHE'S LONGING FOR VESUVIUS

The first reference to the volcano in Naples appears in an entry dated Rome, 24th November 1786, when Goethe reports having received news about geological activity at Mt. Vesuvius. There, Goethe observes that: "doch setzt das gegenwärtige Ausbrechen des Feuers des Vesuvs die meisten Fremden hier in Bewegung, und man muß sich Gewalt antun, um nicht mit fortgerissen zu werden" 'the current eruption of Vesuvius sets most foreigners here in motion, and one must do violence to oneself not to be carried away with them' (Goethe 127; *my trans.*). This passage suggests that the eruption has elicited a powerful collective response, and resisting the urge to join the masses required considerable effort. Yet, Goethe's reaction also gestures toward more ambivalent emotional states: Goethe defines the volcano as a "Naturerscheinung" 'natural phenomenon' (127; *my trans.*) which "hat wirklich etwas Klapperschlangenartiges" 'has something rattlesnake-like about it' (127; *my trans.*). The employment of such a metaphor thus connotes volcanism as a phenomenon imbued with both danger and fascination, akin to the deadly allure of venomous snakes.

The theme of attraction to peril is further reinforced in the following lines written on the same day as the previous entry:

Es ist in dem Augenblick, als wenn alle Kunstschätze Roms zunichte würden, die sämtlichen Fremden durchbrechenden Lauf ihrer Betrachtungen und eilen nach Neapel. Ich aber will ausharren, in Hoffnung, daß der Berg noch etwas für mich aufheben wird (127)

all the art treasures of Rome were rendered worthless—all the foreigners break off the course of their contemplations and hurry to Naples. But I will persevere, in hope that the mountain will still save something for me (*my trans.*).

Once again, Goethe reflects on the reaction of his contemporaries and how natural forces can exceed in beauty the highest peak of human creations. Moreover, a significant cultural tension that would animate the late 18th century and the early decades of the 19th century: the coexistence of classical art and Vesuvius represents a fundamental tension between ideals of harmonious beauty and the emerging Romantic concept of the sublime, wherein the measured perfection of ancient forms stands in opposition to the destructive yet magnificent power of volcanic activity. This juxtaposition reflects the young Goethe's philosophical view. At this moment, Goethe writes at the intersection of Enlightenment rationalism and the nascent Romantic sensibility. His writings are representative of the period's growing conviction that aesthetic experience could no longer be confined to classical parameters of order and proportion but demanded a new aesthetics capable of encompassing both beauty and the sublime.

Despite the frequent news of Vesuvius' activity, Goethe would have to wait several months to fulfil his desire to witness the volcano in action. Although he is forced to restrain his enthusiasm, his excitement ultimately emerges from numerous textual references. During his final days in Rome, marking the conclusion of the first part of the *Italian Journey*, Goethe returns once more to contemplating the volcano, emphasising both its eruptive power and his yearning to experience it firsthand: "Der Vesuv wirft Steine und Asche aus, und bei Nacht sieht man den Gipfel glühen. Gebe uns die wirkende Natur einen Lavafluß! Nun kann ich kaum erwarten, bis auch diese großen Gegenstände mir eigen werden" 'Vesuvius hurls stones and ashes, and at night one can see the summit glowing. May active nature grant us a stream of lava! I can hardly wait until these grand phenomena become mine as well' (155; *my trans.*). Simultaneously, the volcano, though still unseen, also functions as a hidden presence in Goethe's writing. For instance, volcanic imagery accompanies Goethe as he travels from Lazio to Campania through the southern Italian landscapes. This region is consistently described as composed of "vulkanische Hügel" (160, 168) or "vulkanische Aschhügel" (163), that is, 'volcanic (ash)hills' (*my trans.*).

On February 24th, his desire is at last fulfilled. Upon arriving in Sant'Agata de' Goti, Goethe finally catches sight of the volcano, which greets him with "eine Rauchwolke auf seinem Scheitel" 'a cloud of smoke on its summit' (163; *my trans.*). The author's happiness is now openly manifested, as Goethe explains in a later passage: "für mich erfreut, daß ich diesen merkwürdigen Gegenstand endlich auch mit Augen sah" 'personally pleased that I finally saw this remarkable object with my own eyes' (164; *my trans.*).

3. A JOURNEY THROUGH NAPLES'S VOLCANIC SITES

The section of *Italian Journey* dedicated to Naples offers a rich and detailed description of the city and its volcanic sites, that is, *Campi Flegrei* and, more importantly, Vesuvius, which Goethe visited three times. At the same time, the text shows a gradual approach to the volcanic edifice, which is at first appreciated at a distance, and then becomes one of the last images remembered in Goethe's afterthoughts at the end of his travelogue.

3.1. Mount Vesuvius and the city of Naples

Once in Naples, as he plans his excursion to the volcanic sites in the area, Goethe further expands his reflections on Mt. Vesuvius as an integral part of the city as well as its most dangerous source of hazard. The volcano appears as a threatening presence, which contrasts with the picturesque rhetoric

the author initially employs to describe Naples. On the one hand, Goethe writes that: "Neapel selbst kündigt sich froh, frei und lebhaft an" ‘Naples itself announces itself joyfully, freely, and vivaciously’ (164; *my trans.*). Goethe wonders at the sight of its baroque churches, mighty squares, "Gebäude mit flachen Dächern" ‘houses with flat roofs’ (164; *my trans.*), "[d]ie Weinstöcke von ungewöhnlicher Stärke und Höhe, die Ranken wie Netze von Pappel zu Pappel schwebend" ‘its vines of unusual strength and height, the tendrils floating like nets from poplar to poplar’ (164; *my trans.*) and its "unkenntlichen verworrenen Ruinen" ‘unrecognizable, confused ruins’ (163; *my trans.*).

However, the amenity of the city, which is even compared to a "Paradies" ‘Paradise’ (164; *my trans.*) at some point, is contrasted by the ‘shadow’ of the volcano. Goethe writes that: "Der Vesuv blieb uns immer zur linken Seite, gewaltsam und dampfend!" ‘Vesuvius remained always to our left, violent and steaming!’ (164; *my trans.*). In truth, several urban settlements in the area are exposed to volcanic risks, as Vesuvius’s “piedmont belt hosts [now] an almost uninterrupted series of towns totaling over 600,000 inhabitants” (Aucelli, Brancaccio and Cinque 390). Indeed, Volcanism has always been a threatening, subtle presence for the inhabitants. For instance, Goethe even compares Vesuvius to the devil: “Gewiß wäre der Neapolitaner ein anderer Mensch, wenn er sich nicht zwischen Gott und Satan eingeklemmt fühlte” ‘Certainly the Neapolitan would be a different person if he did not feel himself wedged between God and Satan’ (Goethe 193; *my trans.*), stressing a recurring connotation that characterises his representation of the volcano throughout his *Journey*.

3.2. The representation of secondary volcanism in the Phlegrean Fields

About a week after his arrival in Campania, Goethe reports in his diary a vivid description of the Phlegraean Fields, following his visit to Pozzuoli and, presumably, Monte Nuovo, Agnano, and Astroni (De Lucia “Goethe sul Vesuvio”). Nonetheless, throughout the text, it remains unclear whether Goethe considered the caldera beneath *Campi Flegrei* an autonomous volcanic system or part of the Vesuvian complex, despite the former being located west of Naples and the latter to the south-east. As a matter of fact, the name of the Phlegrean Fields is never mentioned in *Italian Journey,* neither in Italian nor in German.

From a geological perspective, the two sites are different types of volcanic entities, although both Vesuvius and the Phleagrean Fields are part of the Campanian volcanic arc. The former is classified “as a stratovolcano because the edifice is composed of alternating strata of lava and pyroclastic deposits, due to effusive and explosive eruptions, respectively” (Aucelli, Brancaccio and Cinque 389). The latter, by contrast, is a caldera and “the largest volcanic structure in the area […] whose upper half of the ~ 13 km-diameter collapse structure is exposed, while the lower half is submerged beneath Pozzuoli Bay and the Tyrrhenian Sea” (Costa et al. 3).

Beyond these primary volcanic structures, the region's geological activity also features secondary effects, visible at a macroscopic level. Such effects have been known since ancient times and have attracted people’s curiosity and interest. Among them, one can list: bradyseism, the formation of solfataras, “affected by intense diffuse degassing and fumarolic activity determined by both magmatic and underground water” (Aucelli, Brancaccio and Cinque 396) and mofetes. In particular, mofetes occur when carbon dioxide is emitted through fractures in the soil and “[i]n unventilated places, such as caves, the CO2 bec[o]me[s] concentrated in pockets that exten[d] a few centimetres from the ground since the gas is denser than air” (Costa et al. 5).

These secondary effects are rendered by Goethe through figurative language that vividly describes *Campi Flegrei*. For instance, bradyseism is characterised as a property of the soil, defined as "der unsicherste Boden" ‘the most unstable ground’ (Goethe 167; *my trans.*). The fumarolic activity and mofetes are depicted as "Trümmern undenkbarer Wolhälfigkeit" ‘ruins of unimaginable cloudlike half-forms’ (167; *my trans.*) and “Schwefel aushauchende Grüfte" ‘crypts exhaling sulfur fumes’ (167; *my trans.*), accompanied by "siedende Wasser" ‘boiling water’ (167; *my trans.*) and “Pflanzenleben widerstrebende Schlackenberge" ‘slag heaps that resist or are hostile to plant life’ (167; *my trans.*). Initially, these spaces are experienced as “kahle" ‘bare’ (167; *my trans.*) and "widerliche" ‘repulsive’ (167; *my trans.*), but Goethe is then surprised to discover "eine immer üppige Vegetation, eingreifend wo sie nur irgend vermag, sich über alles Ertötete erhebend, um Landseen und Bäche umher, ja den herrlichsten Eichwald an den Wänden eines alten Kraters behauptend” ‘an ever-lush vegetation,

encroaching wherever it can, rising above all that is dead, surrounding crater lakes and streams, claiming on the walls of an old crater the most magnificent oak forest' (167; *my trans.*).

3.3. Goethe's visits to Vesuvius

The first proper visit to Mt. Vesuvius takes place on the 2nd of March. The solemnity of this moment for Goethe is signalled by the incipit of the diary entry, which begins with an emphatic construction that is rendered by the verb's placement at the beginning of the sentence: "bestieg ich den Vesuv" 'I climbed Vesuvius' (168; *my trans.*). This climb from Resina involved mule transport and hiking along an older lava flow from 1771, passing the hermit's dwelling on the volcano's western face, in an area that would later become the site of the *Osservatorio Vesuviano*, "the first volcanological observatory in the world" (De Lucia "Goethe on Vesuvius"). Despite "der Rauch" 'the smoke' (Goethe 168; *my trans.*), Goethe successfully observed "den alten nun ausgefüllten Krater" 'the old crater, now filled in [with lava]' (168; *my trans.*). However, his initial intention of approaching the cone of the "Aschenberg" (168) was hindered by the volcanic gases, which "so stark wurden" 'became too strong' (168; *my trans.*). Nonetheless, the volcano remained quiet during his visit, showing no explosive activity or audible rumbling. This expedition prompted Goethe to conduct systematic geological observations, leading him to contemplate the underlying processes responsible for the volcanic phenomena he witnessed, including his discovery of what appeared to be an exposed lava tube decorated with mineral formations resembling stalactites: "tropfsteinförmige Bekleidung einer vulkanischen Esse" 'dripstone-shaped lining of a volcanic chimney' (168; *my trans.*).

On the 6th of March, Goethe embarks on his second visit to the volcano, accompanied by the German painter Johann H. W. Tischbein and two guides. The two German intellectuals diverge not only in their aesthetic ideals but also in their contrasting attitudes toward the volcano. Goethe observes that Tischbein approaches this climb "ungern" 'reluctantly' (172; *my trans.*) and attributes this hesitation to the fact that Tischbein is a visual artist, "der sich nur immer mit den schönsten Menschen- und Tierformen beschäftigt" 'who always occupies himself only with the most beautiful human and animal forms' (172; *my trans.*) and "ja das Ungeformte selbst, Felsen und Landschaften […] vermenschlicht" 'humanizes even the unformed itself – rocks and landscapes' (172; *my trans.*). Consequently, for Tischbein, the volcano manifests as something unrepresentable, "abscheulich" 'abhorrent' (172; *my trans.*), "eine solche furchtbare, ungestalte Aufhäufung, die sich immer wieder selbst verzehrt und allem Schönheitsgefühl den Krieg ankündigt" 'a terrible, shapeless accumulation, which constantly devours itself and declares war on all sense of beauty' (172; *my trans.*).

Paradoxically, the very shapelessness that repels Tischbein constitutes the volcano's primary attraction for Goethe. In a subsequent passage, after arriving near Vesuvius's crater, Goethe realises that "weil man nichts sah, verweilte man, um etwas herauszusehen" 'because one saw nothing, one lingered, trying to make something out' (173; *my trans.*), thereby relying on the poet's imagination as an extension of sensory perception. It is therefore not surprising that, at the end of *Italian Journey*, Goethe compares the volcano to a text: "einen Text vor uns, welchen Jahrtausende zu kommentieren nicht hinreichen" 'a text before us which millennia would not suffice to comment upon' (309; *my trans.*).

This textual metaphor becomes particularly evident in Goethe's representation of Vesuvius's eruption, where he employs a highly literary style:

Solange der Raum gestattete, in gehöriger Entfernung zu bleiben, war es ein großes, geisterhebendes Schauspiel. Erst ein gewaltsamer Donner, der aus dem tiefsten Schlünde hervortönte, sodann Steine, größere und kleinere, zu Tausenden in die Luft geschleudert, von Aschenwolken eingehüllt. Der größte Teil fiel in den Schlund zurück. Die andern nach der Seite zu getriebenen Brocken, auf die Außenseite des Kegels niederfallend, machten ein wunderbares Geräusch: erst plumpten die schwereren und hupften mit dumpfem Getön an die Kegelseite hinab, die geringeren klapperten hinterdrein, und zuletzt rieselte die Asche nieder. (172-73)

As long as space permitted us to remain at a proper distance, it was a grand, spirit-lifting spectacle. First a violent thunder that resounded from the deepest abyss, then stones, larger and smaller, hurled

by the thousands into the air, enveloped by clouds of ash. The greater part fell back into the abyss. The other fragments, driven to the side and falling on the outer side of the cone, made a wonderful noise: first the heavier ones thudded and bounced down the cone's side with a dull sound, the lighter ones clattered after them, and finally the ash trickled down. (*my trans.*)

On a stylistic level, Goethe's representation first exploits imagery related to the semantic sphere of hell, such as “Donner” ‘thunder’, “Schlünde” ‘abyss’, “Steine […] in die Luft geschleudert” ‘stones hurled […] into the air’ and “Aschenwolke” ‘clouds of ash’. These words are also linked to other metaphorical structures employed previously to describe the volcanic setting. For instance, Goethe says that the route to Vesuvius shows "etwas Plutonisches" ‘something Plutonic’ (173; *my trans.*), whereas he reports that Tischbein considers the volcano an "Ungetüm" ‘monster’ (173; *my trans.*). This hellish set of images, evoking terror and danger, is then reinforced by the employment of adjectives as modifiers that expand the scale of the event, amplifying the perceived intensity of the eruption. For instance, the violent thunder comes from the “tiefsten” ‘deepest’ abyss, whereas the stones thrown into the air are not few but “tausenden” ‘thousands’. Despite this pandemonium-like setting, this terrifying view is held capable of eliciting delight, thanks to "ein wunderbares Geräusch" ‘a wonderful noise’ (173; *my trans.*), hinting at the possible experience of the Sublime.

For these reasons, on an intertextual level, the beginning of this passage may bring to mind the reflections of Edmund Burke on this aesthetic category, specifically on how "at certain distances, and with certain modifications, [terrible events] may be, and they are delightful" (Burke 14). Indeed, Goethe's contemplation is suddenly interrupted by his proximity to the volcano, as its activity forces him and his group to climb down to "am Fuße des Kegels" ‘the foot of the cone’ (Goethe 173; *my trans.*) after the eruption intensifies. To console himself, Goethe then resolves to divert his attention to the lava flows.

Goethe's observations of lava follow the suggestions of one of the guides, who demonstrates in-depth knowledge regarding the formations present at the site. "Der betagte Führer" ‘The aged guide’ (174; *my trans.*) explains to Goethe that, unlike the older ones, "mit Asche bedeckt und ausgeglichen" ‘covered with ash and levelled out’ (174; *my trans.*), the newer ones “besonders die langsam geflossenen, boten einen seltsamen Anblick" ‘especially those that had flowed slowly, offered a strange sight’ (174; *my trans.*).

Remarkably, the kind of geological information provided in this excerpt from *Italian Journey* is quite correct from a geological perspective. Goethe was observing what is called, in present times, "*A‘ā* lava" (De Lucia “Goethe on Vesuvius”), whose surface is coarse and fractured. This type of lava, explains Goethe, "die langsam geflossenen" ‘had flowed slowly’ (Goethe 174; *my trans.*), enough for the outer layer to begin hardening and solidifying. As this hardened crust continues to be pushed forward by the still-molten lava beneath it, the surface fractures and breaks apart, creating large chunks of rock that pile up and tumble over one another during the ongoing flow. This “glühende Gerolle" ‘glowing rubble’ (173; *my trans.*) once again elicits Goethe's aesthetic response. He describes the appearance of the lava blocks, noting how they resemble "wunderbar zackig erstarrt verharren, seltsamer als im ähnlichen Fall die übereinander getriebenen Eisschollen in similar cases" ‘wonderfully jagged formations, stranger than ice floes driven over one another’ (174; *my trans.*).

Overall, *Italian Journey* demonstrates Goethe's pronounced interest in lava formations. In an entry dated the 20th of March, he notes that news of recent lava flows extending down to Ottaiano "reizte" ‘tempted’ (192; *my trans.*) him "zum dritten Male den Vesuv zu besuchen" ‘to visit Vesuvius for the third time’ (193; *my trans.*). Once again accompanied by the two guides from the previous ascent, the group is "mutig" ‘brave’ (192; *my trans.*) enough to reach the newly formed crater on the volcano's northern side. At this new location on the volcanic edifice, Goethe observes with keen interest the dynamics of the lava flows, "eine sanfte, ziemlich ebene Fläche hinabfloß" ‘flowed down a gentle, fairly level surface’ (192; *my trans.*). This time, his description of this phenomenon retains an enchanted tone, as Goethe compares the channel created by the flow to a "Glutstrom" ‘glowing stream’ (193; *my trans.*), which “ruhig fortfließt wie ein Mühlbach” ‘peacefully onward like a mill brook’ (193; *my trans.*).

Goethe’s curiosity and desire to admire the lava more closely compel Goethe to venture nearer to the point where the crater breaks away from the mountain to form a "Gewölb und Dach über sich her bilden" ‘vault and roof over itself’ (193; *my trans.*). However, his fascination leads to reckless behaviour, despite his reassurances to his companions about staying away from danger ("seid versichert: da, wo ich gehe, ist nicht mehr Gefahr als auf der Chaussee nach Belvedere" ‘Rest assured: where I go, there is no more danger than on the road to Belvedere’) (169; *my trans.*). Suddenly, Vesuvius's activity becomes more unstable: as "der Boden ward immer glühender; sonneverfinsternd und erstickend wirbelte ein unüberwindlicher Qualm" ‘the ground became ever more glowing; an irresistible vapour swirled, eclipsing the sun and suffocating’ (193; *my trans.*). Goethe finds himself caught in what he defines as a ‘hellish maelstrom’ (193; *my trans.*) of extreme heat and choking gases, from which he is rescued by his guide, who grabs his arm and pulls him back to safety.

The carelessness of his final experience marks Goethe’s last excursion on Mt. Vesuvius, though it does not diminish his feelings for the volcano. In the final part of *Italian Journey*, centred on his return to Germany, the image of the volcano is first evoked as one of the many lights sparkling across the sea in the bay of Naples: “Und nun die Sterne des Himmels, die Lampen des Leuchtturms, das Feuer des Vesuvs, den Widerschein davon im Wasser und viele einzelne Lichter ausgesät über die Schiffe” ‘And now the stars of the sky, the lamps of the lighthouse, the fire of Vesuvius, its reflection in the water, and many individual lights scattered across the ships’ (306; *my trans.*). This lyrical tone continues as Goethe recounts his last days in the city, hosted by a friend in a house with a view of Mount Vesuvius. While sitting there at twilight, Goethe is, for the last time, filled with awe by:

der Berg gewaltsam tobend, über ihm eine ungeheuere feststehende Dampfwolke, ihre verschiedenen Massen bei jedem Auswurf blitzartig gesondert und körperhaft erleuchtet. Von da herab bis gegen das Meer ein Streif von Gluten und glühenden Dünsten übrigens Meer und Erde, Fels und Wachstum deutlich in der Abenddämmerung, klar friedlich, in einer zauberhaften Ruhe. Dies alles mit einem Blick zu übersehen und den hinter dem Bergrücken hervortretenden Vollmond als die Erfüllung des wunderbarsten Bildes zu schauen, mußte wohl Erstaunen erregen […] Je mehr die Nacht wuchs, desto mehr schien die Gegend an Klarheit zu gewinnen, der Mond leuchtete wie eine zweite Sonne; die Säulen des Rauchs, dessen Streifen und Massen durchleuchtet, bis ins einzelne deutlich, ja man glaubte mit halbweg bewaffnetem Auge die glühend ausgeworfenen Felsklumpen auf der Nacht des Kegelberges zu unterscheiden. (309-310)

the mountain violently raging, above it an enormous stationary cloud of steam, its various masses separated and corporeally illuminated like lightning with each eruption. From there down toward the sea a streak of glowing embers and glowing vapors; otherwise sea and earth, rock and vegetation distinct in the evening twilight, clear, peaceful, in a magical calm. To survey all this at a glance and to see the full moon emerging from behind the mountain ridge as the fulfillment of the most wondrous picture, this had to arouse amazement […] The more the night grew, the more the region seemed to gain in clarity, the moon shone like a second sun; the columns of smoke, whose streaks and masses were illuminated through and through, distinct down to the smallest detail, indeed one believed with half-armed eye to distinguish the glowing rocks hurled out on the night of the cone-shaped mountain (*my trans.*).

Goethe's final description of Vesuvius is characterised by a pronounced focus on the luminous effects produced by the eruption, a perspective that can also be understood within the context of his scientific interests in optics. Although the mountain appears “gewaltsam tobend” ‘violently raging’, the light emanating from the volcano does not disturb the tranquillity of the surrounding landscape, which is even described as “zauberhaften” ‘magical’. From the author's vantage point, the effect of light refracting in multiple directions from the volcano creates an illusory image. The moon is indeed transformed into “eine zweite Sonne” ‘a second sun’, which, reflecting on the sea, makes the impression that Vesuvius forms a unified entity with its emissions. However, in contrast to Tischbein's observations, the volcano’s dissolution of form does not diminish the scene's aesthetic value. Rather, it enhances it, generating what Goethe defines as one "des wunderbarsten Bildes" ‘of the most wondrous picture’. This spectacle is incomparable, prompting Goethe to proceed to the "Molo" ‘pier’

(310; *my trans.*), to experience such a majesty in its entirety, concluding that: "ein solcher Abschied aus Neapel nicht anders als auf diese Weise hätte werden können" ‘such a farewell from Naples could not have come in any other way than this’ (310; *my trans.*).

4. CONCLUSIONS

Goethe's encounters with Vesuvius in *Italian Journey* reveal a complex interplay between scientific observation and aesthetic experience that epitomises the intellectual tensions of the late eighteenth century. His three ascents to the volcano demonstrate a progressive deepening of engagement, from initial distant observation to intimate proximity with volcanic phenomena, culminating in a synthesis of empirical knowledge and poetic imagination. The author's documentation of geological features, from lava tube formations to ‘*A‘ā*’ flows, reflects his commitment to systematic natural observation. In parallel, his rich figurative language and metaphorical descriptions reveal an aesthetic sensibility that transcends mere scientific recording. Through his integration of geological observation with literary expression, Goethe adopts a personal approach to understanding natural phenomena, one that recognises the volcano as both a dangerous geological entity and a catalyst for aesthetic and philosophical contemplation.

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