

## ‘[F]amous from all antiquity’: Etna in Classical myth and Romantic poetry

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from Hesiod, *Theogony* v 850-60:

And when [Zeus] had overpowered him, scourging him with blows, [Typhon] fell down lamed, and the huge earth groaned; a flame shot forth from that thunderbolted lord in the mountain’s dark, rugged dales, as he was struck, and the huge earth was much burned by the prodigious blast, and it melted like tin when it is heated with skill by young men in well-perforated melting-pots, or as iron, although it is the strongest thing, melts in the divine earth by the skilled hands of Hephaestus when it is overpowered in a mountain’s dales by burning fire. In the same way, the earth melted in a blaze of burning fire.

Anna Seward, Sonnet LXIII: ‘To Colebrooke Dale’

Thy Genius, Colebrookedale faithless to his charge,  
Amid thy woods and vales, thy rocks and streams  
Formed for the train that haunt poetic dreams,  
Naiads, and nymphs, now hears the toiling barge  
5 And the swart Cyclops’ ever-clanging forge  
Din in thy dells; — permits the dark-red gleams  
From umber’d fires on all thy hills, the beams,  
Solar and pure, to shroud with columns large  
Of black sulphurous smoke, that spread their silk  
10 Like funeral crape upon the sylvan robe  
Of thy romantic rocks, pollute thy gales,  
And stain thy glassy floods; — while o’er the globe  
To spread thy stores metallic, this loud yell  
Drowns the wild woodland song, and breaks the poet’s spell.

from Anna Seward, ‘Mount Etna’

IMAGINATION, while thy kindling eyes  
Bend o’er the Climes these faithful pages trace,  
Oh, may’st thou paint them, as sublime they rise,  
In novel beauty, and horrific grace!  
5 Swell the rich treasures of poetic Fanes  
With all the pomp that mighty ETNA boasts,  
As glaring o’er th’affrighted Deep she reigns  
The pride and terror of Ausonian coasts!

10 With thy keen glance the veils of Distance pierce!  
With thy firm step conduct my venturous way,  
And on the texture of my proudest Verse  
The changeful glories of her heights display!

[.....]

25 Then, while amaz'd we lift exploring eyes,  
To the vast CONE, high in the lurid air,  
We mark, in one eternal union rise  
The elements that wage eternal war.

30 Deep in the snows it has now power to melt  
View the dread GULPH, in all its boiling ire,  
Where sleet and ice and billowy floods have felt  
How weak their force to quench its raging fire.

TERRIFIC PINNACLE! thy sides inclose  
Th'unfathom'd GULPH, coeval with the WORLD,  
35 And by thy flames, that burst 'mid circling snows,  
Up sightless heights the blazing rocks are hurl'd.

Their dire explosion rends the frozen mound,  
Shakes the firm earth and thunders o'er the Deep,  
While issuing deathful from the fierce Profound;  
40 Rolls the red Lava down the icy steep!

[.....]

85 Now turn we, sighing, from the boundless Scene,  
Mocking the feeble sight's eluded ray,  
While wonder mellows into thought serene,  
As sinks in evening shades the garish day.

90 Here, while we rove beneath thy wayward skies,  
Lov'd Albion, zon'd by Ocean's azure wave,  
To NATURE let our hearts thanksgivings rise,  
For all she banish'd as for all she gave!

95 That not on *our* cold mountain heights reside,  
On Snowdon, or Helvellyn's peak sublime,  
Th'ETNEAN GRACES; – in their ardent pride,  
And baleful charms, *exil'd* this happier clime.

Faithful if here their lineaments shall flow,  
O BRYDONE, may the praise be thine alone!  
Since in thy traits arise, thy colours glow  
100 The BRIGHT DESTROYERS, on their burning Throne!