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**"Picnic at Pompeii: Hyperbole and Digression in the Warm South"**

Anna Jameson, in her *Diary of an Ennuyée* (1826), describes a picnic at Pompeii. The food and drink consumed, she asserts, are so extravagant that they distract from the aesthetic pleasures and antique associations of the spot. Discussing this unfortunate effect, she implicitly defines gastronomy as a concern that can all too easily displace a sense of wonder, and plunge the traveler into bathos. At the same time, however, she attempts to reclaim gastronomic pleasure as an adjunct to wonder, arguing that a simpler range of wines and foodstuffs would have helped her to experience Pompeii more profoundly and intensely.

The paper explores the ways in which the two tropes of hyperbole and digression are deployed in accounts of Naples, its surroundings, and its ancient past, in travel narratives of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. These two tropes both play a major part in travel writing throughout its history. Since the structure of hyperbole (a 'throwing beyond') is transgressive - it entails going beyond the bounds of sober, mundane utterance - digressive remarks can easily deflect the force of hyperbolic responses to sights and wonders. During this particular period, travelers often use digression from elevated to mundane concerns (such as a shift from the aesthetic to the gastronomic, or from the sublime to the absurd) as a means of commenting ironically on the hyperboles required of the traveler on the Grand Tour: a number of accounts of Vesuvius shift rapidly from acclamations of the sublimity of the erupting volcano to narratives of trivial social exchanges while viewing or ascending the mountain.

When describing vestiges of the ancient past – whether architectural ruins, paintings and sculptures, or other artifacts - travelers sometimes suggest that objects of this kind offer an especially good opportunity for digressive speculation: since little is known about the remote past, they imply, the imagination is free to re-invent it. In Lewis Engelbach's *Naples and the Campagna Felice* (1815), for example, the traveler-narrator relates the untrammled imaginings that some of the works of antique art on view at Portici unleash in an Italian woman.

At the same time, however, particular forms of digression can also intensify the hyperbolic force of accounts of the foreign. In Naples, travelers often deploy a form of geographical digression, in which, describing the city and its environs, they are led to muse upon more remote and exotic locations: the city is compared, for example (with reference to the manners of its inhabitants), to places as diverse as Russia and Tahiti, and (with reference to its geology) to sites in the Andes, and to the Arctic wastes. Such digressions intensify the reader's awareness of the city as the site of wonder.