Gender and Culture in Eighteenth-Century Italy

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> What you say about the Italians is what all foreigners
> say, what must strike them at first sight. But you must
> probe more deeply to judge this country.
>
> —Germaine de Staël, *Corinne, or Italy* (1807)[1]

Touring Italy, Again

"The voyage to Italy is the most interesting of all possible voyages," declared the abbé Gabriel-François Coyer after his trip of 1763.[2] Italy had long captured the imagination of foreigners, but it did so to an unprecedented degree during the eighteenth century, when Grand Tourists arrived in ever-growing numbers. They came primarily to view the tangible remains of Italy's glorious past—its art, architecture, great libraries and museums, and especially its antiquities—and to sample certain elements of its present that they found in the theaters, opera houses, coffeehouses, casinos, and salons. "One comes to Italy to look at buildings, statues, pictures, people," wrote Hester Lynch Thrale Piozzi in 1789.[3] In an era in which travel was a necessary part of a gentleman's education and increasingly a possibility for a handful of adventurous women, firsthand experience of Italy became an

essential prerequisite to any claim to be a citizen of the world. "A man who has not been to Italy," declared Samuel Johnson in 1776, "is always conscious of an inferiority from his not having seen what it is expected a man should see."[4]

Two years after Coyer completed his voyage, twenty-five-year-old James Boswell explained to Rousseau why he lingered in the southernmost parts of Europe: "My desire to know the world made me resolve to intrigue a little while in Italy," he confessed.[5] The very month that Boswell penned this letter, Tobias Smollett found himself in Florence shunning the very thing that his fellow Scotsman craved: "the intolerable caprices and dangerous resentment of an Italian virago."[6] He haunted the Uffizi and dreamed of visiting it daily in another life in which he would reside permanently in Florence. When Smollett arrived in Rome, he avoided the common practice of hiring an antiquarian, furnishing himself instead with maps, guidebooks, and an unschooled Roman servant so that he could see the city for himself rather than claim any pretension of connoisseurship in the hands of a professional and learned guide (*cicerone*). It was experience rather than knowledge that he sought to acquire. By contrast, Boswell happily reported to Rousseau from Rome: "I have almost finished my tour of Italy . . . and I believe that I have acquired taste to a certain degree."[7]

While these representative travelers may not have agreed uniformly about how Italy would be the culmination of their education, they nonetheless concurred on the fundamental role of an Italian experience for eighteenth-century Britons and Europeans. In between their trips, for example, lay the imaginary journey of Ann Radcliffe's English travelers, whose wanderings in Naples, set in "about the year 1764," were the pretext for telling her melodramatic tale of love, family, honor, and Roman Catholic iniquity in *The Italian* (1796).[8] The year 1764 was also the first time that the antiquarian Edward Gibbon laid eyes on the Eternal City. His three-month encounter with Rome famously inspired the writing of *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (1776–1783). Gibbon was hardly alone in the desire to produce something tangible from his Italian experience. The astronomer Jérôme de Lalande, whose year in Italy commenced in August 1765, transformed his experience into a bestselling guidebook, *Voyage d'un françois en Italie* (1769), so lengthy, detailed, and definitive that Napoleon's advisors used it as a blueprint for pillaging the scientific and artistic treasures of the Italian peninsula almost thirty years later. Germaine de Staël carried the updated edition of Lalande's book with her during a trip which inspired

the writing of her melancholic bestseller *Corinne or Italy* (1807; Figure I.1). An allegorical and highly nostalgic portrait of Italy as a "learned lady" for foreigners to love, her novel immortalized one of the crucial images of Italy in the eighteenth century.[9]

As even a casual perusal of eighteenth-century travel literature reveals, there were many ways to tour Italy.[10] Two years after the appearance of Lalande's bestselling Baedeker for the enlightened public, Charles Burney highlighted the value of a musical Grand Tour in *The Present State of Music in France and Italy* (1771), presenting Italy as a feast for the ears as well as the eyes. The landscape of Roman ruins, Renaissance palaces, and Baroque galleries and churches also revealed a wealth of contemporary vocal and instrumental talent. Burney took his readers to the opera houses and into homes where learned *conversazione* gave way to musical performance. In Bologna, he visited the retired castrato Carlo Broschi (1705–1782), better known to his fans as Farinelli, and first laid eyes on the improviser Maria

Figure I.1 Elisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, *Madame de Staël as Corinne*, 1808. Erich Lessing/ Art Resource.

Maddalena Morelli (1727–1800), celebrated under her Arcadian name as Corilla Olimpica, in Florence where he sang tenor to her accompaniment on violin. [11] He very much wanted his readers to *hear* Italy just as Lady Anne Miller, also on the Grand Tour in 1770, sought to create an artistic guidebook that went beyond simple enumeration of paintings—mere catalogues without any hint of knowledge or taste that transformed such a list into an experience of connoisseurship. She promised readers of her *Letters from Italy* (1776) that she would describe "even to tediousness" absolutely everything she saw. [12]

The Grand Tour has played such an important role in the study of eighteenth-century Italy that it is virtually impossible to discuss the Italian peninsula during this period without some allusion to the significance of foreigners in shaping perceptions of Italian society, especially after the Treaty of Aix-la-Chapelle in 1748 which inaugurated a half-century of peace after several decades of intermittent warfare, making it far easier to travel. Their writings, published and unpublished, created an indelible image of Italy as an early modern tourists' paradise, a terrain of exploration and self-discovery that quickly established a sort of humdrum routine as successive waves of travelers followed in the footsteps of their predecessors, marching to the tune of the latest guidebooks and rarely deviating from this well-trodden path. [13] This Italy was an itinerary rather than a living, breathing entity; it existed to confirm assumptions and prejudices rather than to overturn them, and it outlined a history of a region that its inhabitants would—and did—write differently.

When the London-based Italian teacher and journalist Giuseppe Baretti (1719–1789) published his acerbic rebuttal to the stereotypical images of Italy in the writings of Grand Tourists in 1768, he aptly summed up the character of the oblivious visitor, describing him as someone who "saw little, inquired less, and reflected not at all." Baretti echoed the commonly held view among Italians that few foreigners really understood anything of the history, culture, and customs of the land they visited, preferring an imaginary Italy to the actual one since it was a more effective mirror of their own preoccupations. Foreigners, he observed, were less apt to comprehend the differences between the Italian states, preferring to transform this long and complicated set of relations and linguistic, cultural, and political differences into a unitary whole. "But it is so hard to say any thing universal of Italy," he warned his readers. [14] Such misperceptions were compounded by a strong sense of cultural superiority on the part of many Grand Tourists that Baretti hoped to dispel. He

not only recounted the misbehavior and ignorance of English youth abroad but also sought to correct exaggerated accounts of the political turpitude, religious decadence, laxity of morals, and lack of ambition that allegedly flourished in the warm Mediterranean climate. Certainly Italy was different, but that did not necessarily make it inferior to the lands north of the Alps which, after all, drew so much inspiration from this part of the world.[15]

Not all foreigners who passed judgment on Italy were quite so transitory or ill-informed. In an era in which the Austrian Hapsburgs and the Spanish Bourbons ruled most of Italy, save for the Papal States and the republics of Genoa, Venice, and Lucca, and when the English and French saw the Italian peninsula as critical to maintaining their own presence in the Mediterranean through trade and diplomacy, there were many reasons to linger awhile in the Italian peninsula. Each of these four major European powers considered its attachment to Italy to be an important component of any claim to be the presumptive heir of the ancient Roman empire. Growing numbers of foreigners resident in the principal Italian cities—British consuls such as Joseph Smith in Venice, Sir Horace Mann in Florence, and Sir William Hamilton and his flamboyant wife Emma in Naples; antiquaries such as Johann Joachim Winckelmann and James Byres in Rome; and an international colony of artists, dealers, connoisseurs, and ciceroni that included such luminaries as painters Anton Raphael Mengs (1728–1779), Gavin Hamilton (1723–1798), and Angelica Kauffman (1741–1807), sculptors Christopher Hewetson (ca. 1739–1799) and Bertel Thorwaldsen (1770–1844), and artist, dealer, and banker Thomas Jenkins (1722–1798) as well as formal institutions such as the French Academy (founded in 1666 and installed in the Palazzo Mancini in 1725)[16]—helped to shape the most urbane aspects of Italian society and culture, especially in the second half of the eighteenth century. Their writings, artworks, and activities contributed to the image of Italy as a foreigners' paradise, and they profited directly from tourists and visiting artists through sales of artworks and antiquities, by serving as guides and providing art training. They advertised their knowledge of this region as the antidote to ignorance and inexperience.

As early as 1740, the well-traveled Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, at the beginning of her own lengthy residence in northern Italy, poked fun at the young English dandies who lounged around the Venetian coffeehouses, elegantly dressed in the latest fashions, sipping coffee and chocolate, spooning sorbets, discussing their latest affairs, and learning no Italian.[17] She would have found Boswell's unrestrained sexual tourism the epitome of the boorish

behavior of the British abroad, though she initially came to Italy in search of her own thwarted *affaire du coeur* with the young Venetian Francesco Algarotti (1712–1764). Disappointed in love, Wortley Montagu found other reasons to remain. Having arrived in Italy carrying her considerable library in tow, she proclaimed it to be the ideal environment in which a thinking woman could flourish, better in every respect than the British Isles. "The character of a learned lady is far from being ridiculous in this country," she informed her daughter in 1753, "the greatest Familys being proud of having produce'd female writers and a Milanese Lady being now proffessor of Mathematics in the University of Bologna."[18] It was the presence of learned women such as the mathematician Maria Gaetana Agnesi (1718–1799)—appointed professor in absentia in 1749 since she never actually left Milan for Bologna[19]—that made Wortley Montagu confident of her chosen land of expatriation. When the French poet Anne-Marie Fiquet du Boccage met her in Venice in the summer of 1757, Lady Mary was sufficiently enamored of the Italy of Benedict XIV to show her visitor a portrait of the pope which she kept in her palace, while professing her utter disdain for Roman Catholicism.[20]

Upon completing her tour of Italy, Madame du Boccage wondered why the French did not correspond more frequently with the numerous talented Italian scholars and poets whom she met.[21] Britons and northern Europeans found Italy a different place, in part because they expected it to be quite unfamiliar. For them, Italy was both a utopia and a dystopia, a place of dreams and aspirations that offered endless opportunities to reinvent one's identity but also a location from which one could return home truly appreciative of the superiority of a world that was not defined and constrained by its past. There was an undeniable stink in the Venetian lagoons and Roman marshes, a sense of indolence in the Florentine galleries, a lingering Spanish decadence to the splendors of Naples that could not be denied—or at least this was what many visitors perceived. Italy had faded so that other places might flourish. "The inhabitants of this country were once the triumphant lords and conquerors of the world; but at present the softer arts prevail," observed Thomas Nugent in 1749.[22] Visitors looked everywhere for signs of this waning of Italy. They found it partly in the mustiness of its relics (talismans of previous eras of great political and artistic regimes) and partly in the perceived corruption of Italian morals that seemed to express itself most clearly in the unusual behavior and occupations of some of its most prominent men and women. What Mary Wortley Montagu considered an

Italian virtue—the flourishing of learned and aristocratic women who pro-claimed their independence from traditional customs and beliefs—others equally perceived to be a sign of Italy's corruption. Was Italy a place where women became men, and men became women? The Marquis de Sade, who fled to Italy in July 1775 to avoid prosecution for a litany of sexual transgres-sions, was quite sure that there was "a great penchant for betraying one's sex" throughout the Italian peninsula.[23] He linked the image of Italy as a world turned upside down to his understanding of its decline since the Renaissance. Trapped in the mausoleum of history and culture, the Italians inevitably could not progress as a civilization.

Were we only to follow the path trodden by the likes of Boswell, Gibbon, Lalande, Sade, the intrepid Lady Mary and earnest Lady Anne, the dash-ing Madame de Staël, and their fellow travelers, we might be left with this impression. The Grand Tour produced a rich and diverse array of docu-mentation—diaries, guidebooks, novels, portraits, sketches, curios, and even buildings—that offers us a glimpse of a vibrant artistic, antiquarian, musical, and literary culture, a world of people constantly on the verge of self-illumination and grand historical reflection in response to their envi-ronment. Some of the most interesting, colorful, and important figures of the eighteenth century traveled to, were inspired by, and passed judgment on the history and contemporary fate of Italy. As a result of this torrent of words and images, it is all too easy to see the fruits of their encounter, both trivial and profound, as the sum total of Italy's contribution to the age of Enlightenment and Revolution, and to see the Italian peninsula only through their eyes.

Seductive as the narrative of the Grand Tour may be, it inevitably limits our vision of the past. Italian society and culture in the eighteenth cen-tury was far more than simply a tourists' playground and artists' haven. This point, of course, is hardly novel but worth revisiting in light of the persistence of certain stereotypes. Rather than simply revisiting the cari-catures of Italian society perpetuated by the accounts of Grand Tourists, we should analyze them in relationship to documents internal to this cul-ture. If the eighteenth century, as many scholars have suggested, was the period in which the Italian peninsula developed new, stronger, and more diverse connections to many other parts of Europe, then one of the goals of studying this century should be an exploration of the dialogue between foreign and indigenous views of Italy.[24] As Ilaria Bignamini observes, Ital-ians were "fully-fledged actors on the scene of the Grand Tour."[25] They not

only shaped this cultural activity by guiding foreigners through their cities, painting their portraits, and supplying them with real and faked antiquities and lessons in Italian history and culture but also sought to realize their own vision of bringing Italy into the modern era.

This volume, originating from a conference held at the Getty Research Institute and the William Andrews Clark Library of UCLA in conjunction with a Getty Center exhibit in 2002 on Italy and the Grand Tour, presents some of the recent work by Italian and North American scholars on eighteenth-century Italy. Our goal is to examine selected aspects of the social and cultural life of the Italian peninsula, both in its own terms and in relation to foreign observations of this region. What were some of the distinctive features of Italy in the eighteenth century? Why did they emerge, and how did they operate in practice? To what extent did these elements of Italian society and culture shape discussions of Italy abroad? Implicitly, while engaging in a dialogue with the scholarship focused on those two classic images of the eighteenth century—the Enlightenment and the Grand Tour—we have tried to indicate the possibilities of another history that expands our understanding of this fascinating period.[26]

We have focused on the relationship between gender and culture for several reasons. As a great deal of recent scholarship has shown, the eighteenth century was an especially important moment for the reassessment of traditional roles of men and women.[27] It was also a critical period in the emergence of a new understanding of sexual behavior and affective relations.[28] Recent work on eighteenth-century Italy has begun to explore these issues, highlighting the Italian peninsula's distinctive contributions to public debates about marriage, sexuality, and the place of women in society.[29] Scholarship on *cicisbei*, castrati, and the sexual behavior and artistic proclivities of Grand Tourists in Italy has begun to develop an account of attitudes toward male sexuality.[30] This volume explores the theme of gender and culture across disciplines; it seeks to create a conversation among scholars in the fields of history, literature, philosophy, art history, and music regarding perceptions of gender in the eighteenth century.

Other Visions of Italy

Far from being trapped irrevocably in its past, Italy was a region undergoing profound political, social, and economic transformation at a level it had not experienced since the end of the Renaissance. At the beginning of the eigh-

teenth century the configuration of the Italian peninsula reflected the outcome of the political struggles of the sixteenth century. The Spanish were the dominant foreign power, ruling Lombardy, the Kingdom of Naples, Sicily, and Sardinia. The Papal States controlled much of central Italy while the Republic of Venice retained its independence and a foothold in the Adriatic, and the Republic of Genoa, closely allied with the Spanish, retained some measure of its political independence and commercial interests in the Mediterranean, including control of Corsica until 1768. A handful of smaller states—far fewer in number by the eighteenth century than at the height of the Renaissance—continued to be governed by hereditary princes, most famously the Medici in Florence, the Gonzaga in Mantua, the Este in Modena, the Farnese in Parma, and the House of Savoy in Piedmont, whose territory and influence grew as others reached the point of obsolescence.[31] Tiny Lucca retained its place as Italy's other long-lived republic while the dukes of Guastalla maintained their autonomy from their Gonzaga cousins in Mantua. With important exceptions, Italy had become a largely aristocratic and agrarian society. Italian cities were still lively places to live in and to visit, full of conversation and cosmopolitan civility, but the vast commercial enterprises and glittering court culture that had brought many of them to prominence in the late Middle Ages and the Renaissance no longer were their defining features.

The first half of the eighteenth century saw the collapse of a number of the political arrangements that had governed the Italian states for almost two centuries. The death of Charles II of Spain in 1700 triggered the War of Spanish Succession (1700–1713) between the Austrian Hapsburgs and the French Bourbons. Many regions found themselves pawns once again in an international game of war and diplomacy. In 1707 the Hapsburgs gained control of the Kingdom of Naples which they subsequently ceded to the Bourbons in 1734.[32] The House of Savoy gained temporary possession of Sicily in 1713—it would later become a Hapsburg (1720) and finally a Bourbon territory (1734)—followed by their acquisition of Sardinia in 1718. Formerly Spanish Lombardy became Austrian in 1713, though the Hapsburg right of possession would continue to be periodically contested until the end of the War of Austrian Succession (1740–1748). In between these events, many prominent ruling families found themselves on the verge of extinction. The marquisate of Mantua, ruled by the Gonzaga since 1328, became a Hapsburg possession in 1707. The death of the last Farnese duke, Antonio, in 1731 precipitated a struggle between the Bourbons and Hapsburgs for control of the duchy. The last surviving male member of the Medici family, the gluttonous

and ailing Gian Gastone, died in 1737. Tuscany welcomed a foreign ruler, Duke Francis Stephen of Lorraine, whose marriage to Maria Theresa paved the way for his succession as emperor in 1745; his third son, Peter Leopold, succeeded him as grand duke in 1765. Like Lombardy, Tuscany was now a Hapsburg possession though not directly subject to its rule.

The uneasy relationship between older and newer visions of Italy might best be observed by considering the aspirations of Elisabetta Farnese (1692–1766), who certainly rivaled the Hapsburg emperor Charles VI (ruled 1711–1740) and his daughter, the empress Maria Theresa (ruled 1740–1780), in the influence she exercised on the political reconfiguration of Italy. The second wife of Philip V and last descendant of the ruling family of Parma, Elisabetta Farnese became queen of Spain in 1714 (Figure I.2). Initially under the influence of cardinal Giulio Alberoni (1664–1752), she aspired to oust the Hapsburgs from Italy in order to reunify many of its disparate parts under a Bourbon-Farnese dynasty. While failing to recover Lombardy and Sardinia for Spain, she nonetheless succeeded in placing her eldest son, Charles, on the Neapolitan throne in 1734 and restored the duchy of Parma and Piacenza (expanded to include Guastalla) to her family's possession under his younger brother Philip in 1748.[33] When she retired from the Spanish court upon the death of her husband in 1746, an English pamphlet begrudgingly admired "the Queen's boundless Ambition" and "extraordinary Passion for governing" by declaring her "Mistress of all *Italy*."[34] Its anonymous author recommended to the new king Ferdinand VI that he either shut his stepmother up in a convent or send her to Siberia to prevent her from undermining his rule. The Spanish queen was exactly the sort of powerful female figure who inspired tales of Italy as a land of literary and political Amazons where men were content to be ruled by women. Elisabetta Farnese embodied the failed struggle to claim Italy for an Italian princely lineage in the face of its reconquest and ultimately political marginalization by various foreign powers.

Farnese's bold plan to reinvent the map of Italy found no immediate successors. The most important indigenous ruler within Italy, the papacy, was on the verge of reversing its longstanding reputation as an ecclesiastic office from which many of Italy's ruling families had realized their ambitions since the fifteenth century. The place of religion in Italian society changed dramatically in the course of the eighteenth century, beginning with a substantial reduction in the temporal powers of the papacy. Failed efforts to capture the Republic of San Marino and to gain Parma and Piacenza for the papacy

Figure I.2 Louis Michel van Loo, *Portrait of Elisabetta Farnese, Queen of Spain, Second Wife of Philip V*, ca. 1745 (oil on canvas, 107 x 84 cm). Réunion des Musées Nationaux/Art Resource.

in the 1730s clarified the secondary status of the Papal States in the carving up of the Italian peninsula. The papacy ceased to vie for new territory. Equally telling, it did not play a decisive role in the diplomatic negotiations among those who harbored such aspirations.[35] Instead, it carved out a new role for itself as the guardian of an immense cultural patrimony, inaugurating what Christopher Johns has aptly described as "Settecento papal arts programs."[36] Under Clement XII (1730–1740)—who restored the papacy to financial solvency, in part by reviving the public lottery—ambitious building and public works projects embellished the façade of Rome, continuing the work of his distinguished predecessor Clement XI (1700–1721). At the same time, the papacy focused its attention on scholarly projects designed to write a more complete and scientific history of Roman Catholicism and its doctrines with the new tools of modern scholarship. Benedict XIV (1740–

1758), another pope inspired by the foundational work of Clement XI, made significant efforts to reform longstanding ecclesiastical rituals and institutions. Like many popes of the eighteenth century, he saw Rome as a city of faith, knowledge, and culture.

Despite this bold new vision of a reinvigorated Catholicism, the eighteenth-century papacy found itself facing a number of challenges, both within and without. The century that began with Clement XI's condemnation of Jansenism in 1713 and Clement XII's condemnation of freemasonry in 1738 ended with the suppression of the Society of Jesus in 1773 during the papacy of Clement XIV (1769–1775) and the forced exile of Pius VI (1775–1799) from Rome at the hands of Napoleon's army. They declared Rome a republic on 13 February 1798 and escorted the pope to Siena a week later. He died a prisoner in the citadel of Valence the following year, having been immortalized in Sade's *Juliette* (1798) as the willing audience for a long history of ecclesiastic debauchery and depravity which Juliette recites as a prelude to a papal orgy.

The transformation of religious values in the age of Enlightenment affected many aspects of Italian society. Throughout the century, the papacy and its supporters grappled with the shape of enlightened Catholicism.[37] This question resonated throughout Catholic Europe but played an especially crucial role in the intellectual life of the Papal States and surrounding territories. Just how modern should Italy become? What did modernity mean in a region rich with history, tradition, and faith? The tensions between traditional values and novel ideas threatened to divide, if not actually shatter, Ludovico Antonio Muratori's (1672–1750) vision of an Italian Republic of Letters. The kind of intellectual experimentation, cultural innovation, and programs for social, juridical, and economic reform that we associate with the Enlightenment played no small role in shaping Italy's eighteenth century. Whether it was in the opera house, the salon, the academy, the gallery, or the pages of journals such as *Il Caffè*, conversations revolved around the possibilities for change. These innovations too caught the attention of the more discerning visitors who perceived the Italian cities as making distinctive contributions to learning, the arts, and public life. For example, many of the most famous and popular sites in Rome, including the Spanish Steps, the Trevi Fountain, the Piazza del Popolo, and the Villa Borghese, were designed, built, or renovated during the eighteenth century. While strongly immersed in the past, eighteenth-century Italians were painfully conscious of the present they inhabited and eager to stake their place in this world.