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Goethe's *Italienische Reise* in its European Context

"A man who has not been to Italy is always conscious of an inferiority, from his not having seen what it is expected a man should see. The grand object of travelling is to see the shores of the Mediterranean."[1] In this dictum Dr. Johnson at once articulated and promoted the vogue for the Italian journey. The visit to Italy became the highlight of the Grand Tour, which began in the later eighteenth century to come more within the economic range of the educated middle class, attracting such men of letters as David Garrick, Adam Smith, John Wilkes, Hume, Gibbon, Fielding, Smollett, Sterne, Johann Caspar Goethe, Winckelmann, Heinse, and Karl Philipp Moritz, to name only a few of the most notable. Travel was stimulated at this time by the perceptible improvement in roads and inns as well as by the relative peacefulness of Europe between the end of the Seven Years War in 1763 and the outbreak of the French Revolution. The Golden Age of travel, as it has been called,[2] witnessed as its by-product an unprecedented efflorescence of travel writing of all kinds. Addison's *Remarks on Several Parts of Italy* (1705) ushered in an era in which nonfiction travel literature not only achieved a commanding popularity, but also attained literary stature as a distinctive genre with recognizable conventions of its own.[3]

Where does Goethe's *Italienische Reise (Italian Journey)* stand in the context of this emergent tradition? This is the question I am here addressing. How did Goethe read Italy, and how does his account relate to those of his predecessors and near contemporaries? In what ways does it conform to, and/or depart from the norms of travel literature of the period? In attempting to site the *Italienische Reise* in this way I am deliberately moving away from the more customary biographical approach, which has focused on its significance for Goethe's life. Its overtly autobiographical nature and its importance in Goethe's development as an artist[4]

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has led to a certain neglect of its qualities as travel writing which I would like to counteract by reading it in its European literary context.[5]

To do this raises, however, a fundamental methodological problem. It could be described theoretically as a problem of genre. In practical terms it amounts to this: to which part or parts of the mass of later eighteenth and early nineteenth century travel writing should Goethe's *Italienische Reise* be compared? Although travel literature becomes an acknowledged genre in the course of the eighteenth century, it denotes an extremely broad category that encompasses unusually wide variations. At one end of the spectrum are the down-to-earth travel manuals, often by hack journalists; these forerunners of Baedecker sought to provide travelers with concrete information about the best routes, eating places, and accommodations, together with the most noteworthy natural and artistic sights to be seen. This type of writing left its precipitate in all travel literature; there is an instructional streak in almost every account of a journey to Italy. It is not so much the didactic intention as the quality of the writing that makes these pedestrian guidebooks so incommensurable to Goethe as to impair the worth of any comparison that might be made.

One of the first criteria in establishing parallels to the *Italienische Reise* must be that of quality. Goethe's particular characteristics as a travel writer can be understood only by comparing him to other travel writers of high literary standing. To put him alongside James Edward Smith, whose *Sketch of a Tour on the Continent* appeared in 1793, or Marianna Stark, whose *Letters from Italy* date from 1800, would simply be to load the evidence in such a way as to pre-empt the banal conclusion that Goethe was a superior writer. I have therefore sought out contemporaneous accounts of a journey to Italy by major writers. Out of considerations of genre, images of Italy in such fictions as Byron's *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* (1812 – 18) or Madame de Staël's *Corinne, ou l'Italie* (1807) have also been excluded because their representation of Italy is secondary to a narrational purpose and embedded in a fictional context. From the point of view of genre, the works most congruent to the *Italienische Reise* are Smollett's *Travels Through France and Italy* (1776), Stendhal's *Rome, Naples et Florence* (1817), Hazlitt's *Notes of a Journey Through France and Italy* (1826), and Chateaubriand's *Voyage en Italie* (1827). These works are in consonance with the *Italienische Reise* in three crucial respects: qualitatively, as works by writers of international renown; thematically, as primary accounts of journeys to Italy; and generically, as first person reports poised between the informational and the fictional.

That is the theoretical rationale of my comparison. Its format will be a juxtaposition of certain key features of these five texts. After a brief review of the routes followed, I want to focus on the modes of narrative or-

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ganization and the choice of material, paying special attention to the perception of the past. In examining these facets, my ulterior agenda is to examine the relationship of the self to the other, or, as the eighteenth century would call it, the balance between reflection and observation. This was becoming a salient issue by Goethe's time. The interest—and, of course, the precariousness — of travel writing stems from the delicate equipoise it has to maintain between the perhaps conflicting demands of the self and the other. The growing cult of the self and of personal sensibility could be seen as a threat, or at least as an erosion, of the conventions of travel writing as they had crystallized in the course of the eighteenth century. For background I want to outline those conventions as the norm that formed the framework for the individual writer.

It was convention, rather than personal wishes or taste, that determined both the writer's actions and his descriptions, dictating the routes to be followed and the sights to be seen as well as the appropriate mode for reporting on them. The itinerary[6] through Italy was more or less prescribed, with a marked preference for the cities over the country. Turin, Milan, Venice, Bologna, Florence, Rome, and Naples were the standard objectives, with Rome as the Mecca for every intellectual traveler. Rome was revered in the later eighteenth century as the very embodiment of Classical antiquity; however, the dearth of a sense for the picturesque in either nature or art resulted in a large measure of indifference to both the Middle Ages and the early Renaissance. Nevertheless, it was curiosity about Italy's past and heritage that inspired most travel writing.

Convention shaped, too, the form of the travel description, which was expected to conform to a certain code that became increasingly well defined with the emergence of travel writing as a genre, even while that code was subject to a continual process of modification. As a sense of species came to be central to eighteenth century literary criticism, readers' understanding depended heavily on their awareness of the author's implied intentions and of the accepted objectives of the form in use. So, for instance, one of the cardinal criteria for the literariness of travel writing was its organization into a narrative, as opposed to a mere dissertation. The two common modes of narrative disposition were the journal format, preferred by Addison and thus of exemplary significance, and the arrangement in letters. But once such a literary organization was instituted, it immediately created a difficulty for travel writing through the tendency to confluence with the novel, particularly with the rise to preeminence of the epistolary novel.[7] So, while the narrative organization in a travel book provided entertainment and continuity, it could also become problematical as soon as it began to blur the distinctions between fiction and non-fiction. As, of course, it was bound to do. The travel writ-

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er's unenviable task was to steer the tricky course midway between the reliable but dull dissertation and the vivid but unreliable fictionalization. Likewise, in style the travel account had to aim at a middle range between the solidity of studied discourse and the freedom of colloquial conversation. The underlying tensions inherent in the genre are summarized in the phrase which the eighteenth century itself coined to encapsulate the purpose of travel writing: "pleasurable instruction," which points tellingly to the innate pull between the documentary and the aesthetic, between the obligations of the traveler and those of the writer.

This dichotomy coincides with another that became more and more vexing as the eighteenth century moved into the nineteenth. This second dilemma, which is in effect a restatement of the first in different terms, is named in the title of Hester Lynch Piozzi's book, *Observations and Reflections made in the course of a Journey through France, Italy, and Germany* (1789). Here are those two key words, "observations" and "reflections." It is important to notice that "observations" take priority over "reflections," and that the assumption made is of an easy compatibility between these elements. They were indeed closely linked insofar as "observations" meant specific descriptions of things seen during travels, while "reflections" denoted the philosophical, aesthetic, moral or political thoughts occasioned by those sights. The ratio between the two could vary greatly; what is more, it changed over the years toward a growing receptivity to the writer's "reflections." The interplay between observation and reflection is so central to travel writing because it subsumes another more radical and significant polarity, that between other and self.

This also was undergoing a momentous shift between the mid-eighteenth and the early nineteenth century. The previous convention that a travel writer must not speak about himself or herself was attenuated to such an extent that travelers became as much poets as geographers. In part this was an outcome of the search for novelty in travel writing, which brought new attention to more artistic and ornamental topics. But in large measure it must be recognized as a concomitant and yet another manifestation of the wider drift of sensibility toward the primacy of the individual, the personal, and ultimately the subjective perception. While many reviewers continued to take exception to the autobiographical, to the focus on the traveler's response instead of on description of the actual object, the advent of the so-called 'picturesque' traveler by the closing years of the century confirmed a change of emphasis whose beginnings can be traced back to the enormous impact of Sterne's *Sentimental Journey* (1768). Sterne's fictional technique of emotional self-dramatization impinged on authentic travel accounts to so marked a degree that they came to resemble memoirs, drawing increasingly on the evidence of the

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writer's own apprehensions rather than on appeals to anterior authorities.

This trend was further fostered by the development of travel itself. As travelers explored areas not charted by their predecessors, such as Italy south of Naples and Sicily, they had to rely first and foremost on their own findings and reactions. Moreover, in order to picture these unfamiliar regions to their readers, they tended to resort to a more elaborate, consciously literary style embellished by imagery associated rather with creative than with reportorial writing. The boundaries between travel writing and fiction had, therefore, become quite porous by the time of Goethe's journey to Italy. Travel literature in fact stood at the crossroads between its traditional allegiance to past models and to external sights presented by a self-effacing observer and its modern privileging of the predilections and responses of an at least partially fictionalized persona.

After this brief survey of the scene at large, let me return to my initial question: where does Goethe's *Italienische Reise* stand within this context? Goethe's own wide familiarity with travel writing has been amply documented by Arthur G. Schultz in an article entitled "Goethe and the Literature of Travel."[8] Over thirteen per cent of Goethe's reading, Schultz argues, citing the evidence of his borrowings from the Weimar library, falls into the category of travel books (457–8). Goethe also had a number of precedents close to home, including his father's *Viaggio per l'Italia*,[9] a collection of forty-two letters covering one thousand and ninety-six quarto pages about his journey in 1739 – 40, Karl Philip Moritz's *Reise eines Deutschen in Italien in den Jahren 1786–88 (A German's Journey in Italy 1786–88)*, published in 1792–93,[10] Heinse's letters about his Italian journey of 1780–83,[11] and Winckelmann's letters[12] of 1756–57, which Goethe mentions with warm approval while himself in Rome. On the other hand, as an avowed "Todtfeind von Wortschällen"[13] ("arch enemy of verbal outpourings"), he frowns on the effusive sentimentality of Sterne and his imitators. This is very much in keeping with his skeptical reserve toward not only the romantic, but to extremes of any kind. Consequently Goethe maintains a critical detachment from certain popular trends of travel writing of his day, preferring to align himself in a conservative stance more with the older traditions of the genre than with recent innovations.

In his route, too, Goethe conforms largely to the accepted itinerary, though with some notable exceptions. Coming from Germany, he does not enter Italy by either of the gateways customary for British and French travelers: Turin, taken by Chateaubriand and Hazlitt, or the coastal water access via Nice and Genoa adopted by Smollett. Instead, his arrival is through the spectacular scenery of the Brenner Pass. Crossing the Alps

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straight up and over, so to speak, makes him experience in an immediate, physical way the striking contrast between North and South. The difference is expressed not just in the expected climatic terms — rainy greyness as against blue skies and sunshine — but, significantly, also in terms of fruitfulness as Goethe comments again and again on the prodigious fertility of the North Italian plain, especially the lusciousness of the peaches, the grapes, and above all the figs, for which he has hankered. This connection from the outset between Italy and abundant productivity, metaphorically as well as literally, is a cardinal element in Goethe's image of Italy. After the Brenner and Bolzano, he joins the typical Grand Tour route through Verona, Vincenza, Padua, Venice, Ferrara, Bologna, and Perugia, all of which he visits in barely two months. The glaring omission is Florence, which he decides on the spur of the moment to bypass in order to reach more quickly his primary goal, Rome. His impatience to get to Rome explains his hasty trajectory through the Northern towns. In his fascination with Rome, which finds expression in his extended stay there, he is true to the late eighteenth century pattern, although he gives greater rein to personal preferences than most other travelers. Goethe clearly asserts his individuality in his foray into the deep South beyond Naples, the wonted limit of even enterprising tourists. To venture as far as Sicily was quite a rarity.[14] Goethe's somewhat idiosyncratic progression through Italy may be taken as emblematic of his tendency to follow the dominant paradigm of his day, while at the same time modifying it at will to suit his own inclinations. He allows himself to be guided, but not dictated, by conventions, and he departs from them without hesitation to follow his own desires.

This same blend of conformity and individuality typifies the narrative organization of the *Italienische Reise*. Given the choice between the letter form popular in the eighteenth century and the journal favored by the romantics, most travelers opt fairly unequivocally for the one or the other in outer presentation as well as in inner posture toward the putative audience, though the two do not always wholly coincide. Smollett, for instance, uses the letter form, opening each section with an overt address, "Dear Sir," and closing with "Yours," or "Your affectionate humble servant," or some variant on this formula. Yet despite these allocutory rituals, he shows surprisingly little audience awareness. He writes in the past tense of recently retrospective memory, switching to the continuing present for his descriptions of the sights of Italy. Chateaubriand, too, casts his *Voyage en Italie* into the mold of letters to a named personage, a Monsieur A. M. Joubert, and he intersperses his report, which is entirely in the present tense, with such turns as "mon cher ami"[15] ("my dear friend") to underscore the directness of the writer-reader relationship. Stendhal, on the other hand, chooses the journal format, with dated entries that are at

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times more like notes than a cohesive account. He writes in the present or the present past in a chatty manner that postulates an intimate rapport with his audience. Hazlitt's writing is the opposite to Stendhal's in its formality and impersonality. His *Notes of a Journey through France and Italy* is arranged in chapters, without dates, and with a prevalence of the historic past tense.

To turn from these works to Goethe's *Italienische Reise* is to realize immediately the complexity of its narrative organization. Outwardly a dated journal, like Stendhal's, it nonetheless bears transparent traces of its origins as letters to his friends in Weimar in its frequent personal invocations, some in the singular, as to an individual, some in the plural, as to a group, and in other vestiges of correspondence in tone and in such formulations as "So viel für diesmal" (187; "That's all for this time"), or "Einen hübschen geschnittenen Stein lege ich bei" (172; "I am enclosing a prettily cut stone").

But Goethe's manifest allegiance to his audience is partnered by a very pronounced and continuing dual consciousness of himself: as an experiencing figure and as a creating persona. This is the feature that most sharply distinguishes his writing from that of any of his contemporaries. The effect of this dualistic consciousness of self is a kind of *dédoublement*. This doubling through the extrapolation of a writing self alongside the traveling and experiencing self has momentous implications for the *Italienische Reise*. It leads to an authorial presence quite different from that animating comparable travel accounts. Precisely because Goethe envisages himself primarily as a writer, he does not engage in the sort of dramatization of his personality prevalent—and problematical—in the work of his peers.

The persona of the traveler commonly serves to lend unity to the episodes of the journey, and to forge links between its various parts. However, the traveler's self-dramatization can easily become more than a heuristic device, and begin to intrude on, or indeed overshadow the narrative itself. This is certainly the case with Smollett, who delights in projecting himself as the splenetic traveler, and also, though to a somewhat lesser extent, with Chateaubriand, the itinerant melancholic, and with Stendhal, the savvy and gossipy man-about-Italy. Taken to extremes, as in Sterne's *Sentimental Journey*, the traveler's quirky personality and responses may wholly displace the travel account. That, indeed, was one of the points of Sterne's satire; he was fully aware of the dangers lurking in what would today be called 'the cult of personality,' and in his *Sentimental Journey* he debunks Smollett and his ilk.

On this score Goethe is in concurrence with Sterne. The distance that he interjects in the *Italienische Reise* between the traveler and the writer may well stem in part from the temporal gap between his journey

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and its final literary format, but more fundamentally it testifies to Goethe's recoil from the contemporary tendency to cultivate an idiosyncratic self that is allowed to dominate the discourse. As a result of his eschewal of an inflated role for the persona of the traveler, the orientation of the *Italienische Reise,* despite its individualistic tone and flavor, remains firmly set toward the object of contemplation and the audience.

The intercalation of the writing self has other important ramifications. It endows the account of travel with a secondary enframing dimension. In this respect the *Italiensiche Reise* is without parallel in the travel writing of the period. Chateaubriand may mention with pride occasions where he is recongized as a poet; Goethe, on the contrary, strives for the utmost anonymity, resorting even to the pseudonym Herr Müller. But while Chateaubriand presents himself as a writer, it is Goethe who truly functions as such. So the *Italiensiche Reise* transcends its origins as a travel record and comes to possess an independent existence as a cohesively organized aesthetic artifact. Nowhere is this more apparent than in its dense web of interlaced motifs and images. I have already mentioned fruitfulness as one such metaphoric complex. Allied to it are the multiple vitalistic images of rebirth, renewal, renaissance, spring, movement, and life that amount to an acquiescence in temporality, but simultaneously also to an affirmation of human beings' capacity to surmount their limits. So while most travel literature depends for its integration solely on the voice and personality of the narrating traveler, in the case of the *Italienische Reise* there is in addition an artistic wholeness that devolves from its shaping by Goethe's creative imagination. Thus it is, as its narrative organization reveals, both a distinctly personal account and an autonomous literary construct obedient to its own internal laws. The traveler Goethe is a manifest presence, but it is the writer Goethe who is in command of the discourse.

I have begun my attempt to contextualize the *Italienische Reise* with an analysis of its narrative organization because this represents in microcosm a paradigm of the work's salient characteristics. The doubleness inherent in the mode of presentation has its complement in the nature of Goethe's vision of Italy, which shows the same extraordinary capacity to embrace apparent opposites and synthesize them into a highly distinctive and harmonious whole. The polarity here is between Italy's past and her present, which Goethe is able to perceive as linked parts of a grandiose continuum rather than as the discrete entities that they seem to his contemporaries. Whereas every other late eighteenth or early nineteenth century travel writer fixes his primary sights on either Italy's past or her present, Goethe alone constantly sees the translucence of the past in the present. His reading of Italy is, therefore, an organic, genetic, and totaliz-

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ing interpretation, in contrast to the fractionalized images offered by his contemporaries. Before considering Goethe more fully from this angle, we need again to look at his contemporaries to set the context.

Smollett and Hazlitt are similar in their choice of focus and, to some extent, in their attitudes. This may be as much a matter of audience as of nationality, for both are addressing a British readership that they take to be in need of a good deal of concrete information about the present day practicalities of travel on the Continent. They provide far more circumstantial documentation about modes of conveyance, amenities (or otherwise) of inns, quality of food, and prices charged than any of their Continental counterparts. After reading Smollett, you know exactly how to set about hiring a boat and a crew to take you along the coast from Nice to Genoa, where to stay overnight, what provisions to take along, and what hazards to watch out for. On occasion Smollett points to "a necessary piece of information to those who may be inclined to follow the same route,"[16] while Hazlitt states his aim as being "to give the reader some notion of what he might expect to find in travelling the same road."[17] This foregrounding of the business of traveling is not only reminiscent of the manuals of instruction; it is also cumulatively to the detriment of the sightseeing because it seems such a hassle just to get there. Despite their earnestness and their considerable knowledgeability, both Smollett and Hazlitt make the impression of being unwilling travelers, fulfilling a distasteful obligation and finding scant pleasure in it. They give geographic and historical data with expansive accuracy, yet with a marked lack of enthusiasm so that things are not animated by any inner illumination.

Of the two Smollett is the more robust and down-to-earth, often noting specifics of climate, speech, economics, and the appearance of streets and buildings as if to assess what it would be like to live there:

> Pisa is a fine old city that strikes you with the same veneration you might feel at sight of an ancient temple which bears the marks of decay, without being absolutely delapidated. The houses are well built, the streets open, straight, and well paved; the shops well furnished; and the markets well supplied; there are some elegant palaces, designed by great masters. The churches are built with taste, and tolerably ornamented. There is a beautiful wharf of free-stone on each side of the river Arno, which runs through the city, and three bridges thrown over it, of which that in the middle is of marble, a pretty piece of architecture: but the number of inhabitants is inconsiderable; and this very circumstance gives it an air of majestic solitude, which is far from being unpleasant to a man of a contemplative state of mind. For my part, I cannot bear the tumult of a populous commercial city; and the solitude that reigns in Pisa would with me be a strong motive to choose it as a place of residence. (222)

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Even this rapid survey shows Smollett's indifference to the antiquities of Italy, which he often regards with an open contempt for their inconvenience. Here is the conclusion of his comment on the Pantheon in Rome:

> the gilding of those colums is said to have cost forty thousand golden crowns: sure money was never worse laid out. Urban VIII likewise added two belfrey towers to the rotunda; and I wonder he did not cover the central hole with glass, as it must be very inconvenient to those who go to the church below, to be exposed to the rain in wet weather, which must also render it very damp and unwholesome. I visited it several times, and each time it looked more gloomy and sepulchral. (270)

No wonder that Smollett came to be the prototype of the splenetic traveler, the model for Sterne's satire of Smellfungus in his *Sentimental Journey*.

Hazlitt is more subtle than Smollett in injecting his negatively tinged reflections into his observations. His perspective is visual insofar as he concentrates on surface appearances and frequently assimilates what he sees to his prior experience of paintings. In Parma, for instance, "We saw, in a flight of steps near one of the barriers, a group of men, women, and children, that for expression, composition, and colouring rivalled any thing in painting" (205). An even more revealing example is his account of the Apennines:

> The Apennines have not the vastness nor the unity of the Alps; but are broken up into a number of abrupt projecting points, that crossing one another, and presenting new combinations as the traveler shifts his position, produce, though a less sublime and imposing, a more varied and picturesque effect. (208)

By placing the traveler vis-à-vis the scene to obtain a "picturesque effect," Hazlitt is enframing and distancing it as it is turned into a picture. So his vision achieves the opposite of the romantic absorption of the phenomena of the outer world into the psyche. Hazlitt, by contrast, dwells on the divide between himself and the other by bringing out its remoteness, its alienism, and particularly its self-contained existence as a tableau to be viewed from afar. The dryness of his descriptions, the dearth of imagery and metaphor, and his recourse to fairly pedestrian adjectives ("beautiful," "delightful," "elegant") all contribute to the overriding sense of stasis, of a deadening flatness that dulls his presentation of Italy. It is as if Hazlitt, like Smollett, were anxious to keep this foreign land at a safe remove: the stance of both signals *Noli me tangere*.

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The two French writers have less in common with each other than the two British except for their assumption of a greater prior acquaintance with Italy on their readers' part. They therefore give few details about travel, less so than Goethe, and absolutely no instructive advice. Apart from that they are wholly heterogeneous. In some respects Chateaubriand's Italy is as distanced as Smollett's and Hazlitt's, though for very different reasons. It comes across as a sort of generic Italy because Chateaubriand does not ever really look closely at anything. His tendency is to a generalized survey, heavy with plurals that evoke type, not specifics. This is his introduction to Lombardy:

> Vous voyez d'abord un pays fort riche dans l'ensemble, et vous dites: "C'est bien"; mais quand vous venez à détailler les objets, l'enchantement arrive. Des prairies dont la verdure surpasse la fraîcheur et la finesse des gazons anglois, se mêlent à des champs de maïs, de riz et de froment: ceux-ci sont surmontés de vignes qui passent d'un échalais à l'autre, formant des guirlandes au-dessus des moissons: le tout est semé de mûriers, de noyers, d'orneaux, de saules, de peupliers, et arrosé de rivières et de canaux. (161–62)[18]

This passage contains a crucial clue to the entire work in that phrase: "mais quand vous venez à détailler les objets, l'enchantement arrive" ("but when you come to look at the objects in detail, enchantment overtakes you"). Chateaubriand's "enchantment" with Italy, that is to say, his emotional response, blocks his powers of observation. He makes little or no attempt at the kind of representational account for which Smollett and Hazlitt strive. Indeed, present day Italy is of no interest to him. Arriving in Rome on the eve of the St. Peter's day feast, he sees the crowds thronging the streets, but, unlike Goethe, he looks right beyond them to the remains of the past dimly silhouetted in the moonlight:

> J'ai vu l'illumination et le feu d'artifice qui annoncent pour demain la grande cérémonie consacrée au prince des Apôtres: tandis qu'on prétendoit me faire admirer un feu placé au haut du Vatican, je regardois l'effet de la lune sur le Tibre, sur ces maisons romaines, sur ces ruines qui pendent ici de toute part. (167)[19]

This scene is characteristic of Chateaubriand in its fascination with ruins and also in its absence of human figures, again in contrast to Goethe's lively and populated Rome. What Chateaubriand sees everywhere are "ruines" (178, 179, 181), "débris" (177), "décombres" (193; "rubble"), "une cour délabrée" (173; "a dilapidated courtyard"), "des pierres sépulcrales

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chargées d'inscriptions mutilées" (173; "tombstones laden with mutilated inscriptions"), things that are "croulant" (176; "crumbling"), "des fers rouillés ensevelis sous les mêmes décombres" (178; "rusty irons buried under the same rubble"), a "vaste cimetière des siècles avec leurs monuments funèbres, portant la date de leur déces" (196; "vast cemetery of the centuries with their funereal monuments bearing the date of their decease"). The most vivid and effective metaphor for this rampant transience, for this piercing recognition that "la vie est une mort successive" (188; "life is a successive death") is contained in the episode of the bird that precipitates some drops of rain onto a stone, wiping out a newly pencilled name just as Chateaubriand is trying to decipher it. The past, however, has no more autonomous existence in the *Voyage en Italie* than the present; there is no sense of historical depth, of a layering of the ages, only a flat surface littered with ruins. This surface acts as the springboard for the traveler's reflections: "Le lieu est propre à la réflexion et à la rêverie: je remonte dans ma vie passée: je sens le poids du présent, et je cherche à pénétrer mon avenir" (169; "The spot is conducive to reflection and reverie: I go back over my past life; I feel the weight of the present, and I seek to pierce into my future").

It is no exaggeration to claim that Italy functions as a prop for Chateaubriand, both a stimulus and a backcloth to his own feelings. The center of the stage—and I use the theatrical term deliberately—is occupied by the self-dramatizing persona of the poet, who is the coloring filter of experience. Not the sights of Italy, but his responses and associations dominate the text, which is an expression of Chateaubriand's "enchantment." So the writing is lyrical and emotive, mellifluous and suggestive, eschewing the precision of sharp outlines in favor of the evocative vision. The looming foreground presence of the traveler's consciousness impels the *Voyage en Italie* toward a covert fictionalization.

Stendhal is in many ways the dramatic opposite to Chateaubriand, although he too, as the controlling animator, towers over the entire spectacle he conjures up. But wheras Chateaubriand's fixation is on the past, Stendhal's is almost exclusively on the present. His commitment is unmistakably to the contemporary scene, to political issues, to social manners (and intrigues), to the performative arts of the day. Even where he does make an excursus into history, it tends to be hasty and perfunctory, for his attention rapidly gravitates back to the present. Describing the cathedral in Milan and sketching its history, he suddenly speculates that the people who meet there as if by chance might be spies.[20] Always the past is, as it were, personalized, that is to say, envisaged in terms of the individuals involved, not as a conflict of ideas or a struggle for power.

This may well be because Stendhal's engagement with contemporary concerns has an ulterior polemical motive, for the specter of Napo-

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leon is never far from his mind. The implicit and at times explicit subtext of his comments on Italy is a critique of France; his admiration for Italian systems of governance is inspired in part at least by his disaffection from his native land. Writing about Italy thus becomes for Stendhal, as for Chateaubriand, a pretext; if for Chateaubriand it provides an outlet for his sensibility, for Stendhal it creates an opportunity for indirect political agitation. Both are in fact appropriating Italy for their own purposes. Stendhal, with his customary passion for masks, conceals his belligerent intentions in the persona he projects as a garrulous, well-informed, but opinionated cicerone, who delights in the anecdotal. His tone is often irreverent and ironic, his manner informal, almost conversational as he darts with mercurial energy from one social gathering to another. That summarizes the order of his priorities: Italy forms the setting, the context for *his* activity; it is the occasion for, rather than the matter of his writing. In short, with Stendhal the other has to take a back seat to the self, just as the past fades before the insistent demands of the present.

This is never the case with Goethe. He alone among all his contemporaries is able to achieve a genuine equipoise not only between self and other (because the self becomes to a certain extent an other as a writer), but also between attention to the past and to the present. The duplicative mode characteristic of the narrative organization becomes even more clearly apparent in Goethe's vision of Italy. The past and the present, as twin and complementary aspects of the same civilization, are totally inseparable for him. This symbiosis of antiquity and modernity is undoubtedly the salient feature of the *Italienische Reise*, and it is also the enabling basis for the more complete and balanced picture of Italy that emerges from this in comparison to other travel reports.

Like Stendhal, Smollett and Hazlitt, Goethe derives his initial impressions of Italy from the scenes momentarily surrounding him. In other words, his primary access is through the present. But in contrast to the critical reserve of many of his contemporaries, Goethe from the outset adopts a posture of enthusiastic openness to the sights and sounds of Italy. At the crossing of the Alps already "ging mir eine neue Welt auf" (13; "a new world opened up to me"), and by the time he reaches Bolzano on the South side of the Brenner Pass he comments: "Mir ist es jetzt nur um die sinnlichen Eindrücke zu tun die kein Buch, kein Bild gibt" (25; "I am concerned only with the sensual impressions that no book, no picture can convey"). It is indeed his animated immersion in immediate sense impressions that is most striking in his response to Italy. He delights in the fruitfulness of the Northern plain, singling out the plump figs, the olives, and the lemons as emblems of the area's natural bounty. He shows an equally spontaneous interest in the everyday life of the common people without any trace of the superciliousness or suspicion of Smollett or Haz-

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litt, or the snobbishness of Stendhal. It is no coincidence that Goethe's favorite adjective, "lebendig" ("lively"), is so frequently allied to the word "Volk" ("people").

This is a typical passage, the account of the street scenes in Verona:

> Auf den Plätzen ist es an Markttagen sehr voll, Gemüse und Früchte unübersehlich, Knoblauch und Zwiebeln nach Herzenslust. Übrigens schreien, schäkern und singen sie den ganzen Tag, werfen und balgen sich, jauchzen und lachen unaufhörlich. Die milde Luft, die wohlfeile Nahrung läßt sie leicht leben. Alles, was nur kann, ist unter freiem Himmel.
>
> Nachts geht nun das Singen und Lärmen recht an. Das Liedchen von Marlborough hört man auf allen Straßen, dann ein Hackbrett, eine Violine. Sie üben sich, alle Vögel mit Pfeifen nachzuahmen. Die wunderlichsten Töne brechen überall hervor. Ein solches Übergefühl des Daseins verleiht ein mildes Klima auch der Armut, und der Schatten des Volkes scheint selbst noch ehrwürdig. (50)[21]

As in this description, so throughout the *Italienische Reise* there is a strong awareness of Italy not as a mere repository of antiquities to be contemplated, or an array of curiosities to be ogled at, but rather as a living present panorama, an actuality that has its concrete incarnation in the people. The famous evocation of the Roman carnival (404–515) as a popular festival is only one of many examples where Goethe observes and records the gusto of the present day population, their appearance, their clothing, their pastimes and games, all the sundry rituals of everyday life. The vividness and dynamism of the *Italienische Reise* stems in no small measure from Goethe's affirmation of the importance of the commonplace present reality as the embodiment of Italy's lasting vitality.

If the key word for Goethe's perception of Italy is "Gegenwart" ("present"), as Staiger[22] has maintained, then only because the past is for him subsumed into the present. Again, the duplicative process becomes manifest as Goethe constantly assimilates the past into the present. In viewing the remains of the past, Goethe proceeds in a manner little different from his approach to contemporary street scenes. There is none of the self-conscious hushed awe, the estrangement we find in Smollett or Hazlitt, much less the morbid elegiac lyricism of Chateaubriand. Goethe is at once briskly down-to-earth and imaginative. His presentation of the amphiteater at Verona, "das erste bedeutende Monument der alten Zeit, das ich sehe" (40; "the first significant monument of the past that I have seen") is characteristic of his method. He begins by noting its present condition: "so gut erhalten!" ("so well preserved!"). Because of its intact state and its continuing potential as an arena, it should, in Goethe's view,

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be seen filled with spectators; that is to say, he promptly draws it into practical present use. In his mind's eye Goethe visualizes the amphitheater crowded with "people":

> Denn eigentlich ist so ein Amphitheater recht gemacht, dem Volk mit sich selbst zu imponieren, das Volk mit sich selbst zum besten zu haben.
>
> Wenn irgend etwas Schauwürdiges auf flacher Erden vorgeht und alles zuläuft, suchen die Hintersten auf alle mögliche Weise sich über die Vordersten zu erheben: man tritt auf Bänke, rollt Fäßer herbei, fährt mit Wagen heran, legt Bretter hinüber und herüber, besetzt einen benachbarten Hügel, und es bildet sich in der Geschwindigkeit ein Krater. (40)[23]

Here the term and concept of "the people" becomes the pivot of the description, the ball-bearing, as it were, on which the focus turns from the historic functions of the amphitheater to its latter day possibilities. There is a crucial switch to the present tense as Goethe envisages the timeless, archetypal behavior of the populace in the arena. The transformation of the ancient deserted amphitheater into a modern forum teeming with people is accomplished by a great leap of the imagination. The past is thereby endowed with a visible existence that extends into the present. Far from being relegated to some separate sector for obligatory (and tedious) study by travelers, the past is here experienced as an essential and integral facet of Italy that determines and shapes her present character in a unique way. Goethe's sympathetic understanding of the role of the past in Italy's present allows him to attain a deeper grasp of its particularity. To him it is not just another foreign land, but the site of an ancient civilization whose impact remains a palpable presence.

Goethe's perception of the Verona amphitheater is paradigmatic of his apprehension of the past in the *Italienische Reise.* A whole series of examples could be cited to illustrate the basic uniformity of his procedure. Always the underlying aim is, as he put it himself, "das alte Rom aus dem neuen herauszuklauben" (130; "to pick the old Rome out of the new"), to see the old as immanent in the new, and to bring out their reciprocal dependence. A prominent instance of this temporal fusion occurs when Goethe views Palladio's edifices in the environs of Vicenza. As with the Verona amphitheater, where he first remarks on its fine preservation, so here he is impressed "wie er durch die Gegenwart seiner Werke imponiert" (53; "how he makes an impact through the presence of his works"). The villas are not regarded as relics of a bygone age; on the contrary, what pleases Goethe above all is "den Palladio nach so viel Zeit noch immer als Polarstern und Musterbild von seinen Mitbürgern verehrt zu sehen" (57; "to see Palladio after all this time still honored by his fellow

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citizens as a guiding star and a model"). He underscores the unbroken continuity of the past into the present, in fact its direct relevance to the present by projecting himself into Palladio's mind in order to retrace the steps wherby he arrived at the solutions he settled on. This imaginative self-reincarnation in an historic persona has the effect once more of forging a powerful link between the past and the present by treating the past not as a closed chapter, but as an open-ended and still challenging subject.

The coalescence of past and present is further reinforced by the homogeneity of Goethe's perceptual and narrative strategies. Whether it be a present day street scene or an ancient monument, the approach is essentially the same. Goethe's dominant sense in the *Italienische Reise* is that of sight; he pointed to the primacy of the visual when he defined his aim in his *Tagebuch (Diary)* of 1786 in that much quoted phrase: "mit einem stillen feinen Auge betrachten"[24] ("to contemplate with a still, subtle gaze"). To fill his eyes with the panorama, he developed the habit of climbing a tower on his arrival in a new place so as to survey it at one sweep and from above. The vantage of the tower afforded the opportunity for a rapid orientation of the entire layout, from which the underlying order and the connections between the various disparate structures could be discerned. This tactic clearly fostered the synthesizing vision so much in evidence in the *Italienische Reise.*

The view from the tower is conducive too, to the kind of distance Goethe sought to establish between himself and the objects of his contemplation. This distancing is very different from that of Smollett and Hazlitt, whose stance denotes reluctance and resistance. Goethe, on the other hand, cultivates detachment in order to put himself into a better position for seeing. "Ich bin den ganzen Tag in einem Gespräch mit den Dingen"[25] ("I spend the whole day in conversation with things"), he notes in his *Tagebuch.* That some of those "things" were products of the contemporary world and some of antiquity does not affect Goethe's *modus operandi.* His predilection for the visual, his habit of distancing himself, and his emphasis on the object itself rather than on its effect are so consistently maintained as to minimize the distinction between the phenomena of the past and those of the present.

This tendency to amalgamation is significantly strengthened by one other factor that must be mentioned briefly, namely Goethe's work as a natural scientist. This was of utmost importance for his perception of Italy, for it led to a quintessentially organic and genetic conceptualization, a disire to comprehend the sights of Italy as the interrelated and interdependent products of natural laws and social forces. Instead of registering a series of disconnected facts, as so many travelers did, Goethe fashions an

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integrating vision that sees the diverse aspects of Italy as segments of a cultural totality. So history and art, flora, fauna, and geological formations, street scenes and carnivals are all linked as facets of a single entity which can be grasped only holistically through an understanding alive to its reciprocally determining ramifications.

In the *Italienische Reise,* Goethe presents a distinctively personal, yet not introspective image of Italy. The integrity of the other is always maintained in the respect Goethe accords alike to Italy's past and to her present. Reflection partners observation without the one ever occluding the other. Goethe works within the dominant conventions of late eighteenth and early nineteenth century travel writing. However, he transforms those conventions, not by the kind of radical innovation represented by Sterne's *Sentimental Journey,* but rather from within, through the richness of tone, the density of texture, and the depth of his appreciation of Italy, all of which distinguish his reading in the *Italienische Reise* from that of even the most eminent among his contemporaries.

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