Historical Introduction

I

A leisurely progress of two weeks (8 to 22 or 23 October 1828) in an elegant *calèche* brought Cooper and his family from Bern to Florence and the beginning of their Italian sojourn. In Cooper, "the apathy of one who had got to be a little blasé" after eleven weeks of "sublime communion"[1] with the Alps began to give way to delight at the softness, exuberance, and artfulness of the Piedmontese lake district, Milan, Bologna, and a succession of smaller towns in Lombardy. Yet for him these were not the true Italy: both the Piedmont and Lombardy were still too Alpine in landscape and culture, and Lombardy was then in Austrian hands. The "Lower, or true Italy" included Tuscan Florence and points south, and Cooper's way of absorbing it was to concentrate on four of its most celebrated places. The family thus spent nine months in Florence (Letters II–X); four months on the Bay of Naples (Letters XI–XX); five months in Rome (Letters XX–XXVI); and ten days in Venice (Letters XXIX–XXXII). After a residence of eighteen months, they left Italy in May 1830 for Dresden.

Henry James would later write of "the sense of rest and leisure that must in olden summers have awaited here the consenting victims of Italy, among ancient things all made sweet by their age,"[2] and though it was not in Cooper's nature to give complete consent to its seductive atmosphere, Italy induced in him, repeatedly, a mood of *dolce far niente*, a desire "to make a *siesta* of life, and to enjoy the passing moment."[3] In this state of mind, his senses seemed continually caressed. People, objects, places, and events—even the simplest daily rituals—seemed enveloped by a warm glow which softened him, bringing out feelings of admiration, tenderness, and even love. Just how deeply his experience of Italy affected him is movingly evident in his gesture of farewell. He left, his wife observed, "looking

over a shoulder" (295 in the present edition). Later he would call Italy "the only region of the earth that I truly love" and would liken it to his own house, and even to "another wife," who "haunts my dreams and clings to my ribs."[4] After the publication of his book of gleanings in 1838, he wrote to his friend Horatio Greenough, "I could wish to die in Italy."[5]

Domestic arrangements, daily rituals, the artful ceremonies of life in the "capital" cities of Florence and Rome, Italian architecture, the monuments of classical antiquity, painting, and most particularly the Italian landscape all took special places in Cooper's itinerary, and all made their contributions to his experience of Italy.

Moderate in their spending, the Coopers lived exceedingly well in a succession of fine hotels, apartments, and suburban villas. After a month or so at the Hotel York in Florence, they moved on 25 November to an apartment in the Palazzo Ricasoli on Via del Cocomero (now Via Ricasoli), "but a step" from the Piazza del Duomo. In the spring (1 May 1829), they moved to the Villa St. Illario, in the hills beyond the Porta Romana. In the late summer, after ten days at the Hotel delle Crocelle in Naples, they moved on 20 August to the Villa del Tasso, reputedly Tasso's birthplace and a shrine for Romantic travelers, in Sorrento. In their second winter, after a brief stay in the Hotel de Paris in Rome, they moved in December 1829 to an apartment at 50 Via Ripetta, its windows overlooking the Tiber and St. Peter's. And in their second spring, in Venice (28 April–7 May), after a stay at the Leone Bianco, they took an apartment near the Piazza San Marco.

In these spaces, Cooper savored with continual delight "the good things of this world, in the shape of creature-comforts" (143). In his book, he pays homage to the elegant, even magnificent, "mode of living" in Italian palazzos. At Florence, he celebrates the wine of the Ricasoli vineyards, brought daily to his apartment in the palace, as "among the best of Tuscany" (20); at Naples, quail, *beccafichi*, and the *lachryma christi* of Vesuvius. At the Villa St. Illario, he discovers what he takes to be the perfection of the sense of taste: a "single fresh fig . . . after the soup" (69).

His social life in the cosmopolitan cities of Florence and Rome had a kindred effect and, with that of Paris, became for Cooper

the model of what society in a true capital should offer. The highest form of civilization in America, he declares, is still the commercial town, and its society is characterized by "a certain absence of taste, a want of leisure and of tone; a substitution of bustle for elegance, care for enjoyment, and show for refinement" (82). By contrast, he evokes the life of the two Italian capitals, in scenic *tableaux*, as a series of ceremonial *fêtes*—a ducal reception, masked balls, the Easter Illuminations, a picnic on Monte Mario—in which people hold gay, leisurely, richly toned and elegant converse with each other, easily and without pretension. Assiduously ignoring the Italy of bohemian "Cafés and valets de place,"[6] Cooper flourished in the company of the emigrés and expatriates who were, he observed in Florence, "at the head of the gaiety of this place" (24). Received as an artist and a man of the world, he cultivated friendships with the families of Louis Bonaparte, the former King of Holland, and of Camillo Borghese, whose family art collection in Rome was one of Italy's finest. At the same time, he kept up his friendships with Horatio Greenough, Gouverneur Wilkins, and John G. Chapman, their conversations leavened by their common attraction to Italian art.

Cooper's interest in this art, indeed, was even more intense and germinal than his interest in the social life of Italy, though both, of course, were related expressions of Italian civilization. Everywhere in Italy, Cooper studied the feats of engineering and architecture: roads, bridges, aqueducts, and port facilities; the ubiquitous walls surrounding towns and cities; palaces, churches, urban houses, and suburban villas. The verbal sketches of these works in *Italy* are so frequent as to suggest at times the notebooks of an architect. During the 1820s, Cooper had in fact become an articulate critic of American architecture.[7] His preference for the Gothic Revival style, however, survived his exposure to Italian architecture. In Rome, he emphasizes, "one sees no Gothic architecture" (235), though he does concede that its function as a "grand" and "magnificent" place in the landscape, if not its virtues as a style, is "nobly supplied" by such masterworks—mostly Baroque—as St. Peter's and the Vatican, the Corsini Chapel in the Church of St. John in Laterano, and the early seventeenth-century Palazzo Borghese.

Cooper's interest in the artifacts of Republican and Imperial

Rome was equally intense and similarly qualified. Their excavation, begun in the 1740s and continued throughout the nineteenth century, had engendered the eighteenth-century classical revival evident in the sculpture, the architecture, the political ideals, and the literature of the new republic; and none of these expressions was lost to a generation schooled, as Cooper's was, in Latin. Yet in his response to the Capitoline, Cooper shows himself to be, like his Romantic contemporaries, more aware of the differences than the kinships between the Roman and the American republics. "We call our legislative structures Capitols," he argues, "under some mistaken notion . . . about the uses of the Roman Capitol." The latter, "originally, was a town; then a fortress . . . and, in the end . . . a collection of different objects of high interest, principally devoted to religious rites" (222). In the ruins and museums of Rome, Cooper did encounter "objects of high interest," but unlike Jefferson's generation did not see them as expressions of a civic ideal to be emulated. In the Vatican Museum, for example, he is less interested in the sculpted busts and figures of Roman statesmen than he is in the "precision and nature" (239) with which classical sculptors had wrought animals.

His classicism is centered on rural and on late-classical aesthetic ideals: thus his continuous interest in the villas and ruined temples embellishing the Campagna and the bay of Naples; his excitement over evidence of the ancients' "private life" revealed in the excavations of Pompeii and Herculaneum; and his interest in Virgil's use of the Baian shore in Book VI of the *Aeneid*. His choice of the Laocoön over the Apollo Belvedere as "the noblest piece of statuary that the world possesses" (240), like his qualified attraction to Baroque architecture, demonstrates his preference for energy and complexity over classical simplicity in the plastic arts.

Cooper's most generative experience of Italian art was with its splendid galaxy of Renaissance and Baroque painting. His visits to the municipal galleries which displayed this painting were a regular feature of his itinerary from Milan to Naples to Venice; and during the winters of 1828–1829 and of 1829–1830 he had the opportunity for close examination of the paintings in Florence and Rome, where the most extensive collections hung on display.

Cooper was, of course, neither unique nor naive in this interest. The gradual emergence of the picturesque aesthetic in England during the eighteenth century had renewed interest in a corpus of paintings by Raphael and Michelangelo; da Vinci; the Venetian masters (Titian, Tintoretto, and Veronese); the Eclectics of Bologna (Caracci, the "divine Guercino," Guido Reni, and Domenichino); Correggio; and the trinity of Baroque mentors to Romantic landscape painters: Nicholas Poussin, Salvator Rosa, and Claude Lorrain. Rome, with its great collections of this work, had become one of the capitals of Romantic painting. With the rise in popularity of landscape painting in America, Salvator Rosa and especially Claude Lorrain became major influences on American painters. Claude's house in Rome housed John Vanderlyn and later Horatio Greenough. Thomas Cole occupied Claude's studio in 1831 while he ranged the Campagna sketching Claudian landscapes. "Claude, to me," wrote the founder of the Hudson River School, "is the greatest of all landscape painters: and, indeed, I should rank him with Raphael or Michael Angelo."[8]

Cooper was drawn to Italian painting (and to Northern European painting as well) not as a dilettante or critic but as a student of the picturesque. He had already played, and would continue to play, a pioneering role in the application of this aesthetic to the appreciation of American wilderness, to the embellishment of inhabited landscapes, and, above all, to the art of the novel.[9] In the galleries of Italy, Cooper had the opportunity of refining his knowledge of the aesthetic by a study of its models, for, despite its application to other arts, the picturesque was based on values "capable of being illustrated by painting." Unfortunately for modern readers, he chose to reveal little of what he saw there. The reason he offers in his book is that visits to the galleries had been an obligatory staple of travel narratives for so long that "the subject is . . . hackneyed" (10). It is also probable that his knowledge of the painting from etched or lithographed copies made his encounters with the originals less of an epiphany for him than it had been for earlier travelers, "whose pictorial view of landscape . . . can be traced fairly exactly to the actual sojourn in Rome, where the works of Claude and Salvator were to be seen."[10] How Cooper himself employed the picturesque aesthetic in the composition of *Italy* will be

shown in Section III of this Introduction, but it is appropriate here to characterize what he does record about his visits to the galleries.

The allusions in his letters and journals as well as in *Italy* suggest that Cooper was deeply interested in treatments of the human figure and that his taste drew him more towards picturesque beauty than towards sublimity in form and subject. He ranked Raphael over Michelangelo among Renaissance painters, because, though Michelangelo's *Last Judgment* is "one of the most extraordinary blendings of the grand and the monstrous in art," it lacks Raphael's "gentleness and sensibility to beauty" (242). In Florence, he commissioned Greenough to sculpt a copy of three cherubs (details from the *Madonna del Trono*, of the school of Raphael), "the beau ideal of childhood mingled with that intelligence which may be thought necessary to compose a heavenly being. . . ."[11] In Rome, he dwells at some length on Raphael's Vatican frescoes and speaks of the *Transfiguration* as one of the "[s]ix or eight . . . most celebrated easel pictures of the world" (238–39). He draws the line, however, at Raphael's more erotic celebrations of beauty. Raphael's painted designs on jars at Loretto, for example, "exhibit the author of the Transfiguration, very much as Ovid betrays his taste in the Metamorphoses . . . ." "[T]he divinity of the school of Raphael," Cooper concludes, "is not the divinity of an anchorite" (266).

Similar tastes informed his responses to Baroque painting. "All Martyrdoms are nuisances on canvass," Cooper declares of Titian's *Martyrdom of St. Peter* in Venice (283), but the author of the still-uncompleted *Leather-Stocking Tales* seems particularly interested in treatments of St. Jerome's visions in the wilderness by Correggio (in Piacenza) and by Domenichino (in the Vatican), both distinguished by their dramatic use of *chiaroscuro*. He is even more interested in the way Baroque painters modeled their spiritually transfigured women, especially Venus and the Virgin of the Assumption. If he drew away from the erotic, he nevertheless appreciated close attention to the female form. The *Venus de Medici* in Florence is "a beau ideal, a goddess if you will, with little character," but the *Venus of Capua* in Naples' Museo Nationale is "exquisitely womanish," a creature of "flesh and blood."[12] The allegorical figures of Guido Reni's *Phoebus*

and the Hours Preceded by Aurora (a fresco in Rome's Palazzo Rospigliosi), in whose faces lines melted and flowed into one another, producing what one observer had called a picturesque effect of "pleasing languor, which the union of all that is beautiful impresses on the soul,"[13] moved him to commission John G. Chapman to make a copy.[14] But he paid perhaps his greatest homage to Titian's women, with their "brilliant complexions and fair hair" (275) and a vitality heightened by the "blaze of glory" which the painter's colors produced (282), making special mention of the *Venus of Bartolini* in Florence and the *Assumption* in Venice, "one of the most gorgeous Titians extant" (282). Consciously or intuitively, Cooper seems to have recognized in these women that sensuous ideality he also saw in Italian landscape, as if they were its *genii loci.*

More than the life and art of the cities, indeed, it was the suburban and rural landscapes of Italy which most fully engaged Cooper's intelligence and informed his feelings. The Apennines, the Roman Campagna, and the Bay of Naples were, for most romantic travelers between 1820 and 1880, the climactic experience of Italy. Places Italian painters had drawn for three centuries, they seemed themselves to be immense, exquisite works of art—every tree, body of water, and rock form sculpted to perfection by weather, 'improved' by the signs and artifacts of Italian civilization, transfigured by the luminous softness of Italian light, and enriched by their long association with art and literature. In the Apennines, with their cliffs, gorges, cataracts, and blasted oaks, the traveler viewed a Salvatorian landscape, with overlays from the Gothic fictions of Ann Radcliffe and Washington Irving. On the Roman Campagna, the traveler viewed a landscape painted by Claude both from the place itself and from the descriptions of Horace and Virgil. Perhaps a Claudian *steffage* of trees framed and energized the foreground. In the middleground, Horatian shepherds with oaken staves stood in enigmatic kinship with ruined houses or temples. In the background to the west loomed the dome of St. Peter's, "the monument" (Irving called it) ". . . over the grave of ancient Rome";[15] to the east, the surge of the Alban and Sabine Hills, with the Apennines in the mellow blue distance. Around the Bay of Naples, the traveler viewed what was, or

could have been, a Claudian coastal landscape with reminders of Virgil: skies of prodigal softness and tonal variegations; boats on an aqua-marine sea; volcanic upthrusts of land, their outlines softened by time and enhanced by terraced and porticoed villas, monasteries, and villages.

It was on these landscapes that Cooper concentrated in the rural excursions which dominated his itinerary: the transits from city to city, especially those which took him through the Apennines north of Florence, northeast of Naples, and northeast of Rome; the excursion to Marseilles by way of Genoa in the spring of 1829; the walks through the hills around Florence in the early summer of 1829; the "aquatic excursions" from Sorrento to Ischia, Capri, Baiae, and Pozzuoli and the explorations of Pompeii, Herculaneum, Vesuvius, the hills of Sorrento, and Paestum during the late summer and fall of 1829; the weekly horseback rides on the Campagna during the spring of 1830. It was his verbal sketches of these landscapes to which he would give pride of place in *Italy* and in which he would try to concentrate all that Italy had contributed to his mastery of the art of the picturesque.

Savor Italy as he did, however, Cooper did so after a day's work. In Florence, undistracted even by Carnival, he worked steadily on *The Wept of Wish-ton-Wish*, and his excursion to Marseilles was primarily an effort, fruitless as it turned out, to get the finished novel printed there or in Paris. (It was subsequently printed in Florence, by order of the Duke, at the Dante's Head Press). In Florence, too, Cooper began *The Water-Witch*. By September, in Sorrento, he was "on the *middle* chapter"; and by 6 January 1830, in Rome, he had finished this novel, too.[16] By 9 April he was "concocting another"[17]—possibly *The Bravo*, on which he was still at work when he left the country that would "haunt [his] dreams."

II

Cooper wrote of his Italian experience in a variety of ways. One was the journal sequence begun on 13 October 1828, which ends suddenly and inexplicably at Sorrento (7 October 1829),

including nothing on Rome or Venice.[18] Another was a series of "finished" landscape sketches incorporated into novels: the Bay of Naples in *The Water-Witch* (1830); Venice in *The Bravo* (1831); and Italy's west coast in a later novel, *The Wing-and-Wing* (1842). He did not begin his Italian travel narrative until 1837, seven years after he had left the country.

When he finally did come to it, *Italy* took about four months of gestation and four months of writing. On 19 November 1836, Cooper wrote to his English publisher, Richard Bentley, offering *England* and suggesting that *Italy* would follow.[19] By 6 March 1837, the book was "under way";[20] by 14 April it was "nearly done."[21] On 8 July, he posted the finished manuscript aboard the *Pennsylvania*, bound for England, where it was published in February 1838.

A tangle of distractions and rebuffs and the insistent need to pay a proper homage to Italy complicated his work on the book. As he wrote it, he was reading proof for *England* and projecting or writing *The American Democrat*, *The Chronicles of Cooperstown*, and *The History of the Navy of the United States*. He was also embroiled in a dispute with the people of Cooperstown over their claim to Three Mile Point, a piece of family property. The Panic of 1837 and the ensuing depression, furthermore, made him more than usually worried about money, while his publishers were trying to discourage the completion of his travel series because its market had virtually disappeared. A letter from Bentley of 19 February 1837 expressing "the hope that I may shortly have it in my power to announce another Work of Fiction from your pen"[22] must have stung all the more for its indirection.

The rebuffs mounted as Cooper began negotiations for *Italy*. In March, he had offered the book to Bentley for £300 on the grounds that it "will do better with you" than its predecessors.[23] By April, he had reduced his price to £200, "[a]s you say you have not done much" with *France* or *England*.[24] In May, Bentley offered "the sum of £150 leaving the remaining moiety contingent upon the sale of the Work."[25] In July, Cooper received an amended offer of £200, which was paid five months later, in December. *Excursions in Italy* finally appeared in England on 12 February 1838, in a two-volume edition of 1,000 copies, at

a price of 21 shillings. On 12 May 1838, the *Bibliographie de la France* announced the appearance of an English-language edition in France, a reprint of the Bentley, publication date unknown.[26]

Meanwhile, in June 1837, Cooper's American publisher, Carey & Lea, refused *Italy* because of the depression and the losses they had already sustained on the series. Three months later, on 8 September, Cooper tried Carey again, explaining disingenuously his contract with Bentley, noting that he had sent the manuscript and would be receiving the sheets from Bentley, and finally suggesting that, "[a]s the entire series makes a complete work, I suppose you would like to have it."[27] The reply was blunt:

> We do not know what to say of Italy. Since you were here we have not put to press a single new volume & the success of your last eight volumes, we are sorry to say, presents us with no inducement to go on. We certainly have not made one cent by them thus far to pay us for capital & time employed in them—With such results before us we certainly have no inducement to undertake Italy as a speculation.

Carey & Lea finally conceded, however, that "[i]f you are anxious it should come from the same press as the others, we would be willing to print 750 copies & if it should produce any profit divide it between us."[28] On 28 May, the American edition finally appeared in a run of 1,000 copies, for which Cooper received $200. Until now, except for some passages which appeared in Susan Cooper's *Pages and Pictures*,[29] *Italy* has not been reissued.

Reviewers were hardly more encouraging than the book's publishers. Many gave it the briefest descriptive "notice." Most viewed it almost solely as social criticism, emphasizing its sporadic attacks against the English nobility or its reformist critiques of American culture: the lack of a true capital, the subjugation to a spirit of commerce, the "property patriotism." Few noticed its flaws or its real achievements.

English reviews, which were generally favorable, took mild umbrage at its Anglophobia. Typically, *The Literary Gazette, and Journal of the Belles Lettres* (17 February 1838) found it "pleasing," though "it is particularly against England, and the English, that his spleen and dislike are continually thrust into notice." "Pooh, folly!" it said about Cooper's claims of English anti-

Americanism.[30] Perhaps the most perceptive of the English reviews, in the *Spectator* (17 February), stressed the uniqueness of Cooper's approach to a familiar subject:

> he has natural faculties of observation trained by long exercise to a high degree of excellence; he has habits of analysis and reflection. . . . He has an expansion of mind, arising from habits of extensive speculation. . . . To all which may be added, his nativity, which gives him to see European usages with American eyes.[31]

Not surprisingly, some American reviewers discovered anti-Americanism in *Italy*. "Next to abusing your mother," said a reviewer in *American Monthly* (July 1838), "we can conceive of no more elegant recreation than that of villifying your country." If the author would really "prefer to live in Rome," said the reviewer, perhaps it should be arranged "to furnish him with a charger in the shape of a rail, and a full parade-dress of tar and feathers."[32]

Other Americans applauded, even exaggerated, the Anglophobia. Cooper, said *The Hesperian* (July), never missed "a good opportunity of peppering the Britons with grape and canister."[33] *The New Yorker* considered this "habitual sourness" a kind of tonal relief for "the pencillings of Italy."[34]

More perceptive American reviewers heard the dominant tone of the book and considered it the most agreeable and "good natured" of the series. Philadelphia's *National Gazette* (26 May) found that it was happily devoid of "second hand enthusiasm."[35] *The Knickerbocker* (June) thought the "political or personal prejudices" a minor note in a book which pictured the "beauties or grandeur of nature,"[36] though of what these pictures consisted the reviewer did not say.

Cooper was his own most disappointed critic. In the summer of 1838, he confessed to Horatio Greenough: "I have not done justice to Italy, or myself, in the book on that country—I did think to make it a pleasant book of its sort, but the failure is owing to circumstances I could not control. I wanted time to do what I think I could easily have done, with such a subject."[37] Later, when critics began announcing their preference for *Italy* over *England*, Cooper painfully disagreed. In his judgment, there was "no comparison" between the two.[38]

III

When he began *Italy*, Cooper declared that he wanted it to be "more poetical than the First Part of Switzerland, and a little unique, and without politics. . . ."[39] Near its completion, he called it "a *picturesque* book, rather than a political, with a few more touches of society" than *Switzerland* had.[40] Rightly understood, these phrases reveal much about the kind of book Cooper worked to compose.

The term "picturesque book" has a large and elusive meaning which must be inferred from *Italy* itself, in the context of hundreds of travel books which appeared in the first three decades of the nineteenth century. The pattern of these books is traceable to the theory and example of the English parson William Gilpin, whose *Three Essays on Picturesque Beauty* (1792)[41] may be said to explain and advocate much of what they enact in narrative form. The *personae* of these books were versions of the "picturesque traveller," a person of taste and sensibility in pursuit of cultivation. Their object was the discovery of ideal "scenes"—buildings, cityscapes, genre scenes, rural landscapes, wilderness—in which every detail contributed to the complex aesthetic unity of the whole. In theory, the art of the picturesque travel book was the creation of verbal sketches which emphasized the pleasingly irregular outlines and textures of objects (of various kinds and combinations) and the intricate effects of light, shadow, and color to be found in the great works of landscape painting, especially those of Salvator Rosa and Claude Lorrain. In practice, however, and with no warrant from Gilpin, most of these books fell into a rhetoric of ejaculation and "touzy-mouzy" (dizzied and dizzying enthusiasm) which dissolved visual nuance.

As narrator of *Italy*, Cooper clearly styles himself as a version of the picturesque traveler, a "man of sentiment and intellect" (132) patiently attentive to Italy's natural and inhabited spaces. The narrative frame of the book is elastic enough to include a broad miscellany of incidents and reflections, including the *tableaux* of life in Florence and Rome, Cooper's "touches of society." Nevertheless, *Italy*, too, highlights the traveler's pursuit of the ideal landscape, making the book chiefly a series of excursions punctuated by sketches. Cooper's commitment to the

style of picturesque impressionism is clearly evident in his manner of composing these sketches. In his treatment of form and light in the Italian landscape, moreover, one can see how he tried to make the sketches "a little unique" by avoiding the excessive pitches of emotion which blurred the vision of his predecessors; by attempting to synthesize into his picturesque aesthetic elements of both beauty and sublimity; and by valuing what he saw in terms of a new, symbolic, ideography.

The care Cooper took to compose his sketches according to picturesque principles is amply documented. Like those of *Switzerland*, they are fruits of a remarkable collaboration between Cooper's visual memory and his journal. As in the sketchbook of a painter, the journal consists chiefly of descriptive notes taken on the scene or shortly afterwards, while the impressions of it were still fresh. Some notes—those, for example, on the Simplon Pass and the Piedmont, which Cooper incorporated into *Switzerland*, and those on the Villa del Tasso—are detailed verbal sketches. Usually, however, they are of the character advocated by Gilpin. "A few scratches," Gilpin had written, "like a short-hand scrawl . . . , legible at least to ourselves, will serve to raise in our minds the remembrance of the beauties they humbly represent; and recal[l] to our memory even the splendid colouring, and force of light, which existed in the real scene."[42]

Most of Cooper's journal entries are just such scratches: "Describe position of Naples," for example, "Capri &c. &c. Vesuvius much further from the City than I had believed and differently placed"; or "Beautiful villa of Cardinal Ruffo. Splendid scenery of the Bay."[43] Just how much the latter note recalled Naples to Cooper's mind may be seen in the finished sketch in Letter XIII (109–112). As Gilpin suggests, the note locates "the best point of view" and a few "characteristic features" of the landscape; the finished sketch gives scrupulous attention to matters of composition ("a degree of *correctness*, and *expression* in the out-line"), to "a little *ornament* . . . from figures, and other circumstances," and to "some *effect of light*."[44]

In such a fashion, Cooper's Italian journal furnished the verbal sketches for much of the book through Letter XVI. Of the first six journal entries—on the Piedmont, Milan, Piacenza and Parma (12–17 October 1828)—Cooper elaborated some in

the concluding letters of *Switzerland* and the rest in Letter I of *Italy*. The second group of entries—on the departure from Florence, the sea-passage to Naples, and the view from Sorrento (31 July–? September 1829)—he elaborated in Letters XI–XV; and the four final entries on Sorrento (27 September–7 October 1829), in Letter XVI.

Cooper's effort to make his finished sketches "a little unique" began with an attempt to restore an equilibrium between the play of the mind and the play of the eye. In accord with Gilpin's argument, the sketches "[descend] not to the minutiae of objects" but keep to "general ideas"[45] and thus leave room for both kinds of play. But whatever moods or thoughts it might set into motion, the picturesque, for Cooper, was grounded on scrupulous fidelity to the seen world. Necessarily, this conviction set him against the prevailing conventions of the travel sketch, in which that fidelity had been breached, the facts of the visible world ignored, and the traveler's sensibility given too much play. This conviction is evident in Cooper's criticisms of Byron's Italian writings; of Ann Radcliffe's *Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794), a Gothic novel set in the Apennines; and of such popular travel narratives as John Chetwood Eustace's *Classical Tour Through Italy* (1821), Nathaniel Hazeltine Carter's *Letters from Europe* (1827), Lady Mary Wortley Montagu's *Letters and Works* (1837), Louis Simond's *A Tour in Italy and Sicily* (1828), and Mariana Starke's *Travels in Europe* (1827).[46]

Byron's view of the world, wrote Cooper in a letter, was distorted by a "vapid . . . exhibition of gross affectations, puerilities, caprices and morbid vanity: Duels in which no blood is shed, hair-breadth escapes and adventures in countries that are every day travelled without hazard, and the opinions of a traveller of twenty two who had seen Portugal, the South east corner of Spain, Malta, Sardinia, Sicily and a part of Greece! And this he calls some knowledge of Europe, Asia and Africa."[47]

Cooper did not reject the conventions of Gothicism so emphatically, but in *Italy* Mrs. Radcliffe's novel does serve as a reminder of how these conventions distort visual facts to heighten their dramatic effects. His own experience disconfirmed, for example, his preconception of the Apennines as infested with banditti and dotted with Gothic castles. Early in his sojourn, he discovers the reports of banditti to be grossly exaggerated; to-

wards the end, he remarks that he has "not seen the castles of the romances at all" (268).

His recourse to popular travel narratives, finally, kept him to his promise to include "nothing but the gleanings that are to be had after the harvests gathered by those who have gone before me" (51). But more importantly, these books displayed "no definite notions of distances, surfaces, &c." Mrs. Starke, he observes, fails to consider the physical dimensions of the Vatican when she describes it. Carter is wrong in his statements about matters as diverse as Italian scorpions and the identity of the Rialto in Venice.

Cooper's world is not static. For him, it is by its very nature changeful and various, an elusive collaboration between matter and consciousness. He takes no little delight in its illusions and surprises. The *trompe l'oeil* (or visual mirage), indeed, is as important to *Italy* as the *coup d'oeil* ("a sudden scene of grandeur" bursting "unexpectedly upon the eye")[48] is to *Switzerland*. In Florence, for example, Brunelleschi's Duomo seems to rise "like a balloon" from a "field of roofs" (17). The scale of St. Peter's is so massive that men seem "dwindled into boys" (191), and a marble throne at the far end of the church seems "distant as a cavern on a mountain" (192). Venice is "a city afloat" (279).

Yet unlike the victims of "touzy-mouzy," Cooper refuses wholly to be lost or to lose the reader in such warps. That is why his first impulse is to take account of the visible facts of a place. Of landscapes and buildings he is first a topographer, accurately establishing directions, distances, sizes and contours. He early locates, for example, the seven primary topographical features of the Bay of Naples: Naples in the northeast and Castellamare in the southeast corners of the bay, with Vesuvius between and behind them; the two peninsular arms of the bay; and the sentinel islands of Ischia and Capri west of the bay's mouth. Similarly, his eye for size, shape, materials and function in architecture establishes the visible facts of human artifice. In one of his most telling gestures, he embraces a column of St. Peter's "not," he assures the reader, "in a fit of sentimentalism, but to ascertain its diameter" (191).

For most of his facts, however, Cooper seems to have relied upon guidebooks. In writing up the side trip from Florence to Genoa (Letters VII–VIII) and the stops which he made at Ven-

ice, Verona, and Trento (Letters XXIX–XXXIII), he made use of his copy of Engelmann and Reichard's *Manuel pour les Voyageurs en Allemagne et dans les Pays Limitrophes*,[49] in which he had made marginal notes. For the Roman letters, his dependence on the guidebooks of Mariano Vasi was even more extensive—too much so, as it turned out.

The habit of mensuration which allowed Cooper to restore topographical accuracy to the perception of landscape also allowed him, in his "poetical" sketches, to concentrate with greater clarity than previous travelers upon the complex and often only momentary coalescences of form, light, shadow, and color which constitute the picturesque in landscape.[50] These sketches reemphasize the fact that the principles of complexity, variety, and contrast defined by Gilpin and other theorists as the grammar for this language each have manifold visual references. Cooper's sketch of Lago Maggiore, near the end of *Switzerland*, is a glossary of the visual phenomena which make Italy for him so distinctively picturesque. The sheer "multiplicity of . . . objects" in this typically Italian landscape offers one kind of visual complexity. More specific complexities are evident in the "irregular" curve of the shoreline and in the succession of terraces and "bold" slopes leading up from the surface of the lake to the "noble background of the Alps." Visual contrasts and variety manifest themselves in images of villas "buried among fruit trees"; in "castles, or convents, on headlands, or heights"; and in the "strikingly picturesque" groupings of boats "beached in beautiful disorder on the sands" and of the figures of fishermen "anchored on their grounds, or gliding athwart the glassy lake, with all their appliances disposed as one would introduce them into a picture."

Cooper's respect for these complexities of form, in turn, reemphasizes the importance of light—and this, too, patiently observed—as the means of organizing such forms into a coherent landscape. At Lago Maggiore he thus observes the effect of *sfumato*, one of the unique effects of Italian atmosphere: the forms and groupings merge in a "glow," "a dreamy warm mistiness," which softens their outlines and throws back "the chiselled peaks into the distance," so that nearer forms seem bathed in a luminous sea.[51]

Cooper concentrates his study of light on Italy's west coast.

He is particularly drawn to afternoon and evening lights, with their ikonic transformations of form into subtle *chiaroscuros* of glowing gold, silver, rose. At Leghorn, he sees afternoon sidelight sculpting the coastal mountains—"piles that buttress the coast"—in sharp contrasts of light and shadow, rendering them "pictures to study." At the same time, *sfumato* mellows these "magnificent" forms with "a bewitching softness, such as perhaps no other portion of the globe can equal" (84). Later, he observes that the atmosphere mellows "every tint and trait" in the landscape; blends "all the parts in one harmonious whole"; and suffuses the picture with "a seductive ideal, that blended with the known reality in a way I have never before witnessed . . ." (112).

Cooper's study of picturesque form and light in Italy, in fact, took him far beyond Gilpin's understanding of the aesthetic. Like Gilpin, he seems to consider the picturesque a beauty roughened by weather, time, or human usage: the kind to be found in the "irregular" curve of a shoreline, for example, rather than in the symmetrical curve of a Chippendale chair or a clipped tree in an eighteenth-century garden; in the "glassy" sheen of a lake dotted with boats and figures rather than in the unbrokenly smooth finish of a mirror. His sense of Italian beauty extends as well to its wondrously soft, spiritualizing delicacies of light and color and to its subtle harmonies between natural forms, human artifacts, and human figures. His departure from Gilpin begins with his perception, in Italy, of a picturesque beauty interfused with elements of sublimity. Italy's "softened sublimity" (109) manifests itself to him not in vast height or depth, the obscurity of night, desolation, or kinetic power (though these are intermittently evident), but rather in vast distances, grand (not stupefying) scale, the luminous obscurity of haze, magnificence of color and form, and the kind of muted power evident in the time-softened, art-embellished volcanic landscape of Naples.

In the book, picturesque beauty and "softened sublimity" blend so subtly that it is difficult to distinguish them except by their effects on the mind. Nowhere is this more evident than in the sketch of Ischia, with its "black volcanic peaks" in the background; its strolling figures lending a graceful "movement of life"; and its "lofty, fantastic, broken fragment-like crags" loom-

ing into the foreground as the traveler's boat approaches them, everything suffused with soft light. The adjectives in the sketch evoke its touches of sublimity; the light and motion give it its lovely delicacy. In a contemplative pendant to the sketch, Cooper pays homage to the painter who seems most to have helped him to visualize a landscape which for him epitomizes Italy, the paragon of picturesque landscapes. The "flood of sensations [here poured] on the mind," he declares, awakens the kinds of ideas evoked in "an exquisite landscape by Claude" (132).

Cooper went beyond Gilpin not only in his sense of visual complexity, but also in his sense of the effects of picturesque phenomena upon the mind. His best Italian sketches define the elusive interplay of beauty and sublimity in gatherings of various irregular forms transfigured by light and constantly changing as light and perspective change. At the same time, they also transform landscape into a kind of mute, illuminated text whose images are charged with manifold symbolic significances. For Gilpin, the chief value of the picturesque was the pleasure it gave to the educated eye. For Cooper, its chief value was as the embodiment of ideals which could give peace and nobility to human life. Italy's beauty intimates a subtle, tender, and enduring (if elusive) harmony—a world well-kept. Its sublimity intimates a vast, mysterious splendor—a world imbued with a grand design. And this ideography has significance which is variously ethical, spiritual, intellectual, and cultural.

The chief source of symbolic meaning in the sketches is the interaction between light, landscape, and the mind of the beholder. The effects of this interaction are elusive and changeful, because the order they intimate is manifold and defies fixed definition. At times, the light engenders a feeling of *dolce far niente*, easeful, luxuriant, benevolent. Again (the feeling translating itself into a benevolist ethic), it engenders an experience which Cooper likens to an encounter with "an extremely fine woman," the light softening the landscape as "the eloquent and speaking expression of feminine sentiment" softens a woman's "stateliness and beauty." As you would such a woman, he suggests, "you come to love [the landscape] like a friend" (84, 132). Yet again, it engenders a state of mind akin to the calm repose of sleep or death—some dream-like consciousness

in which time is stopped, and the past becomes a tangible apparition "adorned and relieved by a glorious grouping of so much that is exquisite in the usages of the present" (111). Cooper tries to express this state by allusions to magic, witchery, sorcery, and fairy-like presences. In the mountains above Sorrento, the light, the elevation, and the distanced perspective on the abiding "glories of the earth" (141) call forth intense expressions of religious sentiment, affirmations of a divine order manifest in these glories. In the prismatically colored atmosphere of a sunset viewed from Castel St. Elmo, "the whole concave is an arch of pearl; and this . . . is succeeded by a blush as soft and as mottled as that of youth." At one still point in this turning, a "soft rosy tint illumines the base of Vesuvius, and all the crowded objects of the coast, throwing a glow on the broad Campagna that enables one almost to fancy it another Eden" (173–174).

Like so many other Romantic travelers, however, Cooper's most recurrent conception of these intangible harmonies owes less to Protestant orthodoxy than it does to the classical ideal of Arcadia. His Protestantism does perhaps temper his sense of duration in this ideal landscape. *Et in Arcadia ego*, say the death's heads in Northern European painting. The bodies of the naked dead at Campo Santo and the volcanic "cauldron" under Naples offer similar reminders to Cooper, and even his most exuberant sketches are tinged with melancholy. Though Naples has endured for "nearly all of known time" (93), its future is not assured, and its present is not free of "disgusting details"—or of oppression. Nevertheless, the dominant idea suggested by the landscapes is that of a manifold and enduring intercourse between Italian nature and Italian civilization: light, earth, mood, manners, and art all in tender, exalting intimacy with each other.

The composition of the sketches—remarkably consistent for all of the complexity and variety which they encompass—also plays an important role in defining and elaborating Cooper's Arcadian ideal. The backgrounds typically have an amphitheatral shape. In the panoramic sketches, the peaks and faces of the Apennines with their "blue and ridgy" outlines form a "natural wall" (157, 94). More proximate amphitheatres enclose the close-up sketches. The Baian shore repeatedly isolates the life of the bay; cliffs loom even into the foreground at Ischia and

Sorrento; and in Rome, walls and domes create equivalent effects. Each of these amphitheatres has its symbolic function. Appropriately, each isolates the landscape from the rest of the world and at the same time defines the 'scene' for the dramas of interaction between nature, art, life, and mind which take place within it.

By contrast, the foregrounds are usually dominated by figures or buildings rather than by natural objects, and these visibly manifest the kinships between man and nature. The figures are rarely at work; typically they are taking part in a procession or taking their ease, their slow movements at once reflecting their own attunement to the atmosphere and the easeful state of the artist's mind. A sketch of the bay from Capo di Monte, for example, brings into the foreground an assemblage of villagers on a "crescent of sandy beach." The "children sporting on the sands, the costumes and flaring colours of the female dresses," the men with their red caps and "loose trowsers that descend but little below the knee" (123)—all of these details suggest an enlivening intercourse between their village culture, the nature which envelops them, and the artist observing them.

Buildings appear more frequently than figures in the foregrounds and the middlegrounds of the sketches. Like his American contemporaries and successors, Cooper retained a respect for the integrity of objects which distinguishes his impressionism from that, say, of Turner, in whose later paintings objects are dissolved in stormy vortices or annihilated by light. Nevertheless, Cooper tends to image objects diffusely, emphasizing their place in the landscape rather than their discreteness.

Objects, too, thus elaborate his Arcadian ideal, demonstrating the harmonies between nature and Italian civilization. In Italy, Cooper perceives, art embellishes rather than ignores or contests with nature. To accentuate this impression, he tends to de-emphasize foliage, even though he is clearly aware of the picturesque qualities of the poplar, the orange, the olive trees (16, 271). As in the Italian paintings he cites (12, 53), rock forms dominate, especially those of the mountain and the coastal cliff, the architecture repeating these forms in brick and stucco. In the coastal landscapes, Cooper is particularly drawn

to the "wasp-nest looking" villages clustered on cliffs at Villa Franca, Ischia, and Amalfi. From Mount Albano, Rome appears the exemplary improvement of a picturesque site. Its suburban temples and villas embellish the prairie-like "wastes" of the Campagna and graduate into the grand "mountains" of capital architecture.

Like many another Romantic traveler, Cooper is drawn, too, to the classical ruins of Rome, Baiae, Pozzuoli, Pompeii, Herculaneum, and Paestum. Yet three things distinguish his interest from that engendered by the aesthetic of ruin and its pendant drama of historical and poetic associations, which peopled ruins with figures remembered from history, hagiography, poetry, and myth. One difference is that his "recollections," with the exception of St. Paul's disembarkation at Pozzuoli (127–128), take the form of reflection on historical fact more fully than the form of dramatic fancy. Just as he refuses to lose himself in the warps of visual impression, so he refuses to lose himself in imagining Cicero in the Forum, for example, or Horace in the Sabine Hills. The second difference is that he never allows his recollections to obscure his response to ruins as visible objects in a landscape. It is only when the ruins are visually uninteresting—"indistinct, and much dilapidated" (129), as at Baiae; or of little "interest directly to the senses" (219), as in the Forum—that he turns to recollections. They are conspicuously absent in his sketches of the still-intact and impressive Pantheon or the Piscina Mirabile, a Roman reservoir near Baiae. On Mount Albano, with a spectacular landscape laid out below him, he makes not even dutiful mention of the Ovid or Horace he knows by heart, or even of Claude.

In Cooper's *Italy*, the picturesque involves a visualizing and a symbolizing more than an associational intelligence. The blendings of rock and architectural forms have an effect as Arcadian as the effect of light:

> Pinnacles, peaks, rocks, terraces, that, in other countries, the traveller might feel disposed to embellish by some structure, in his fancy, poetical alike in its form and uses, are here actually occupied, and frequently by objects whose beauty surpasses even the workings of the imagination (166).

IV

Sadly, the finished book could not sustain the high aspirations Cooper had for it. His decision to make it a book "without politics" deprived it, from the beginning, of a major element of that synthesizing intelligence he brought to the matter of Europe. Given Italy's political situation, moreover, a book which avoided politics was itself politically significant. In 1815, the Congress of Vienna had rendered Italy, in Metternich's arrogant phrase, "only a geographical denomination," with Lombardy and Venetia annexed to Austria and the old dynasties—all bound to Austria—restored to the other nine kingdoms, duchies, principalities, and states on the peninsula. Popular anti-Austrian and nationalist sentiment precipitated revolts in Piedmont and Naples in the early 1820s, when Cooper was writing *The Pioneers*; and again in February 1831, ten months after Cooper's departure, in Modena, Parma, and the Papal States. Not until 1870 did Italy finally achieve unification.

In the final letter of the book, Cooper's awareness of Italy's political agonies does finally surface. "Sooner or later," he declared a decade before moderate Italian liberals arrived at the same conclusion, "Italy will inevitably become a single State . . . though the means by which it is to be effected are still hidden. . . . [P]erhaps the wisest way is, to direct the present energies to reforms, rather than to revolutions; though many here will tell you the former are to be obtained only through the latter" (299). But Cooper strikes this note too late to keep his book from appearing to accept, tacitly, Italy's status quo. Having met, for example, in an elaborate ceremony, Leopold II, the enlightened Grand Duke of Tuscany, who was also an Austrian archduke, and having formed a favorable opinion of Leopold's character, he is moved in Letter VI to declare that Italy has made heartening progress in the last eighty years—a tired truism that American colonists had often heard applied to their own situation in the years before 1776. Consider, too, his treatment of Adam Mickiewicz, poet and organizer of the Polish Legion. Like Margaret Fuller twenty years later, Cooper befriended the exiled revolutionary in Rome, and Mickiewicz regularly accompanied the American democrat on the rides about the walls of Rome described in Letters XXII and XXIII. The

letters make no mention either of Mickiewicz or of their conversation, though it is tempting to speculate how much of the latter Cooper remembered when he finally made clear his political position on Italy.

Cooper's apolitical treatment of Italy is most problematic in his treatment of human figures in the landscape. As his own later fiction shows, Cooper understood how the picturesque could lend itself to the creation of 'rounded' characters, complex and changeful in behavior and mentality, reflecting social and political as well as physical environments. In *Italy*, however, Italians are simply the ornament of scenes. They are not as phantasmagorical as the figures in earlier travel narratives—not compounds of history, hagiography, and myth. Yet they are flatly conventional creatures of a "poetical" perspective: Virgilian shepherds; priests in solemn ceremonies; colorful beggars; strollers taking the evening light and air. Of such *dramatis personae*, Henry James's remark that an Italy "preoccupied with its economical and political future . . . must be heartily tired of being admired for its eyelashes and its pose"[52] comes uncomfortably close to the mark. Nevertheless, the book's "touches of society" and its depiction of Italy's political environment anticipate by more than sixty years the senses of place which characterize James's own distinguished Italian narratives, *William Wetmore Story and His Friends* (1903) and *Italian Hours* (1909).

Italy's chief flaw is that the pictorial intensity of its landscape sketches is not sustained, as it is in *Switzerland*. By the time he moved to Rome, perhaps unaware of their crucial importance, Cooper had abandoned his journals, and he was thus excessively dependent on guidebooks. When he describes Rome, for example, he turns frequently to Mariano Vasi's *Itinéraire de Rome et de Ses Environs*[53] and at times incorporates Vasi word for word. Here the sketches become infrequent, mostly hurried, and prone to drift into exposition, in the manner of a guidebook. As *Italy* progresses, landscapes omitted loom as large as those included. Cooper 'names' but does not 'do' Tivoli, the *sanctum sanctorum* of rural Rome, and much the same is true of his Venice.

Yet if, on the whole, *Italy* is a less successful book than *Switzerland*, its finest sketches—especially those of the coast from Leghorn to Naples—are indeed "more poetical" than those of

Switzerland. They have a warmth, a complex integrity of impression, and a conceptual coherence which surpass anything in *Switzerland.* They fully reflect Cooper's belief in "the vast superiority of the Italian landscapes" (132), and they are among the finest fruits of his sojourn in Europe.

Picturesque Arcadian Italy became Cooper's paragon of the inhabited landscape. In the book, he confirms its "vast superiority" by comparing it to Swiss and American landscapes. These comparisons, which begin in the closing letters of *Switzerland,* also help him further to codify the elements of sublimity most amenable to the picturesque vision. The Alps' "sublimity of desolation," though ameliorated by "a certain unearthly aspect which the upper glaciers assume in particular conditions of the atmosphere," he concludes, has no lasting value in the education of "the man of sentiment and intellect." The harsh, uninhabitable nakedness of the Alps excites first wonder, then apathy. The "union of the pastoral with the sublime" on the upland slopes of the Alps "astonishes, and it often delights," but the union is too rough and unfinished and the contrast too great, as if nature and civilization had not yet been sufficiently assimilated. "The *refinement* of Italian nature," on the other hand—a refinement produced by weathering, by human use, and most especially by the light—gives rise "to a sublimity of a different kind, which, though it does not awe, leaves behind it a tender sensation allied to that of love" (132).

In contrast to Italy, Cooper concludes, there is "very little of the grand, or the magnificent" in American landscape, but "enough of beautiful nature" to delight the eye, educate the sentiments and the intellect, and inform the arts of the new nation (95). The "property patriotism" which touts the supremacy of the American landscape is simply another form of blindness to the highest values of the visible world, a sign that Americans have not yet understood their natural endowments. Though beautiful, New York is not as beautiful as Naples. Its harbor is a turbid, dullish green; while the Italian coast, including the Bay of Naples, is the color of deep water, a limpid cerulean blue running to ultramarine. In place of the picturesque complexity and curvilinear beauty of Naples' volcanic promontories, bays, peninsulas, and grand islands, New York offers "nothing but the verdure and foliage of spring and summer." New York City

is straggling, thinly populated, busy with "commerce, shipping, drays, and stevedores," and situated on a flat, "shaved" surface; Naples is condensed, overflowing with people, leisurely except for its port, and situated on cliffs. "As regards artificial accessories," New York and the Hudson River run to "Grecian monstrosities, and Gothic absurdities in wood"; Naples, to "palaces, villas, gardens, towers, castles, cities, villages, churches, convents, and hamlets, crowded in a way to leave no point fit for the eye unoccupied, no picturesque site unimproved." And "[i]f New York does possess a sort of back-ground of rocks, in the Palisadoes, which vary in height from three to five hundred feet, Naples has a natural wall, in the rear of the Campania Felice, among the Apennines, of almost as many thousands." Inland American landscapes show equivalent flaws in relation to Arcadian Italy. "Our lakes," Cooper argues, "will scarcely bear any comparison with the finer lakes of Upper Italy; our mountains," like the Alps, "are insipid as compared with [the Apennines], both as to hues and forms" (93–94, 96).

Cooper does not intend these comparisons to be denigrating. His motive is to exercise not an anti-national but an extra-national standard for the perception and judgment of landscape. The imagination of the artist, Gilpin had observed, "is a magazine abounding with all the elegant forms, and striking effects, which are to be found in nature."[54] If the deficiencies of the American landscape become evident on comparison with the ideal landscape in Cooper's mental magazine of landscapes, so too do its subtle virtues and its possibilities for improvement. In *Italy*, thinking about the "gorgeousness" of American sunsets and autumns, Cooper recalls that "liquid softness in the atmosphere" of autumn (173), a kind of American *sfumato* in whose alchemies might be glimpsed a New World version of the Arcadian landscape. As that version took shape in his mind during the late 1830s and the 1840s, Cooper would come to see that the rough and changeful beauties of America's dominant features—trees (forests, forested mountains) and water (lakes, rivers, cataracts)—required picturesque improvements along the lines of the English rather than the Italian garden, of neo-Gothic rather than Italian architecture. But the principles if not the particulars of this vision were most fully grounded in Cooper's experience of Italy.