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**Making History: Travelers' Accounts of
Early Modern Italy**

Carrie Alexander
Honors Senior Project
Spring 1998
Western Washington University

HONORS THESIS

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Introduction

"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 traveling is to see the shores of the Mediterranean."¹

Dr. Johnson's widely cited quote closely enumerated the central role Italy played in the aims of travelers of the early modern period. Italy, admired for its prestige as the location of an ancient civilization; and renowned as a center of learning, has remained an objective of travelers even to the present day.² Yet sixteenth and seventeenth century Italy barely resembled the prosperous, stable, and productive city-states which dominated the Renaissance period two hundred years before. War and economic despair ravaged the Italian countryside and plagued its cities. Despite these complications, coupled by fears of the relentless

¹Tobias Smollett. *Travels Through France and Italy*. (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 1979). See introduction by Ed Felsenstein p. xv

² See A. Lytton Sells, *The Paradise of Travelers: the Italian Influence on Englishmen in the Seventeenth Century*. (London. G. Allen & Unwin, 1964) for a detailed discussion on the historical attraction of Italy. Also see John L. Lievsay, *The Elizabethan Image of Italy*. (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1964) which reveals the dual nature of the English's impression of Italy, "Italy represented the very acme of beauty and culture, of liscence and corruption." p.1

Inquisition, travelers to Italy, especially the English, continued to visit the famed country in order to fulfill their utmost curiosities.

Travelers recorded their impressions of Italy in various mediums: diaries, letters, and guidebooks, which collectively has been defined by historians as travel literature. In English travel literature, writers exercised great freedom in their opinions and descriptions of the Italian people, culture, and religion. These expressed opinions and attitudes were ultimately shaped by the Englishman's background or identity, his religious beliefs and cultural mores, and the historical and political forces which further molded the English national conscience.

As an introduction to English travel literature and travel in Italy, the preliminary chapter will provide a discussion of the political situation of Italy in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the history and background of travel to Italy, and the evolution of travel literature. A general understanding of these three topics will prepare the reader to sufficiently permeate into the minds of early modern travelers to Italy. How did these men view the current state of the peninsula, what were their ambitions and desires, what did they most fear, and how did travel impact their notion of Italians and Italian culture?

The following chapter will seek to confirm that most travelers, well-versed in the classics of ancient Rome and Greece, expressed grave disappointment when confronted with the true state of contemporary Italy. Many writers wondered why Italy did not

appear as the great civilization described within their history books. In this contrast of the real versus the imagined, this chapter will examine the most common complaints made by travelers, such as the poor conditions reflected in the inns, the strange character and practices of the people, and finally the dilapidated state and further deterioration of the remains of ancient Rome.

The final chapter will expose the manifestation of religious conflict within travel literature itself. In the age of the Protestant Reformation and the ensuing Counter-Reformation in Europe, religious fervor was at an all-time high. English Protestant travelers expressed mixed feelings within their writings towards the religion of a people they simultaneously admired and despised. For the most part, anti-Catholic sentiment overwhelmingly dominated the letters, diaries and texts of Protestant travelers, and continued to greatly influence their outlook throughout their Italian journeys.

Chapter 1

"This is the worst countrey, the least productive, the most exposed to cold, and the least capable of Trade of all' [Europe], and yet it is by far the best peopled of any..."³

Writing in the eighteenth century, Arthur Young revealed the growing backwardness of Italy which had accelerated over the last two hundred years, despite the peninsula's grand history. The prevalence of a non-productive political authority and a stagnant economy throughout most of the region contributed to this lamentable picture. Yet Young's statement also indicated that an attraction to Italy still existed. The people of Italy continued to maintain the region's vibrant culture and its impressive heritage; and gladly welcomed travelers into their villages, despite the instability, economic problems, and frequent wars which dominated the early modern period.

Most of sixteenth century Italy had fallen politically and economically under the jurisdiction of the Spanish Empire and the Papacy in Rome. Imperialistic Spain had gained authority over the

³ Arthur Young. *Travels in France and Italy During the Years 1787, 1788, and 1789*. (London & Toronto. J. M. Dent & Sons, 1915). p. 85.

Kingdom of Naples and the Duchy of Milan at the beginning of the century, but Charles V's preoccupation with the profit and defense of the Spanish colonies in the New World greatly diminished Spain's influence in Italy. Thanks to tensions with England over the new Atlantic trade and conflict with France over territorial possessions, Spain largely neglected its Italian assets, with the exception of the collection of taxes. Spain continued to enforce heavy taxes on its Latin American and European possessions throughout the next two centuries in order to fund its wars.

Unfortunately, the majority of the Italian states under Spanish authority and several under the control of the Papacy, including Milan, Parma, Modena, Mantua, and Urbino, endured the most miserable economic conditions on the peninsula, and frequently looked to Venice and France for assistance. One exception was Naples, which enjoyed relative stability and prosperity under the rule of an able viceroy. English traveler Gilbert Burnet described the viceroy as:

"the only Governor held in esteem of all lands he passed. [He] takes care of the soldiers, treats the Spanish and natives equally, regulates the market, ensures the exact payment of taxes from nobles, uncorrupts the courts, fortifys the palace, regulation of Coyn, [and] extricate[s] the Banditti (the plague of the land)."⁴

After traveling to Italy in 1687, Burnet called the Spaniards "terrible masters of the World".⁵ As part of a long

⁴ Gilbert Burnet. *Some Letters...* (Amsterdam: for Widow Swart, Bookseller in the Beurs Stege, 1688). p.152

⁵ Burnet. p. 64

literary and political tradition in England, Burnet effectively villianized the Spanish imperialists resident in Italy. This tradition, popularly known as the Black Legend, stemmed from political and religious tensions between the Spanish and English states which peaked in 1588 with the events of the Spanish Armada, a favorite tale of Englishmen in its own right.

William Maltby in *The Black Legend in England* compares Spain's position in Europe in the sixteenth century to that of the United States in the twentieth century: "wielding enormous power in the defense of an essentially conservative ideal (Catholicism, capitalism), it finds itself the object of hatred and jealousy to friends and foes alike."⁶ As the champion of Catholicism, Spain generated extreme hatred from adamant Protestants who viewed the Spanish as ignorant and bigoted, lecherous and cruel. The typical stereotype designated the Spanish character as possessing "most of the vices and shortcomings known to man."⁷ As England slowly gained recognition as a prominent force in Europe and the New World, English travelers began to channel criticism towards Spain as center of the Inquisition and orthodoxy, and also resent Spanish power and interference in the affairs of France and Italy.

Like Spain, the Papacy and the republic of Venice attempted to assert power and influence over the large number of independent and vassal states in Italy. All three regimes as well as France strove to gain the advantage over the Italian territories, especially over strategic trading routes. As the century wore on,

⁶ William Maltby. *The Black Legend in England*. (Duke University Press, 1968). p.10.

⁷ Maltby. p.6

the Italian peninsula, her land and her people, noticeably suffered from the vices of an inattentive government, high taxes, and war. Only vestiges remained of the once proud, wealthy and independent city-states of the Renaissance.⁸

Regionally, the picture did not appear so grim. The state of Genoa, known as "Genoa the Superbe"⁹, had become a financial center with large palaces and straight streets. Englishman John Evelyn, writing in 1644, remarked that "It is for statlinesse of the buildings, paving and evenesse of the streete, certainly far superior to any in Europe for the number of houses."¹⁰ Piedmont remained a thriving state due mainly to its alliance with the French, while Tuscany enjoyed a high level of independence under the prudent rule of the Medici family. Englishman John Raymond, in *The Italian Mercury*, praised Tuscany for "the courtesy of the people, the purity of the air, and its well-paved streets".¹¹ The Papal states, although poor, avoided the devastation of war thanks to their neutral status. Venice still exercised tremendous power within the area of northern Italy and the Adriatic Sea and remained a constant threat to Spanish ambitions.

The seventeenth century only brought further conflict and war, especially in northern Italy as competing powers sought to gain control of the strategic Alpine pass, the Valtellina, as part of the Thirty Years War. Command over this important highway would determine who would continue to dominate the region. Battles

⁸ Sells, p. 38, provides a great description of the political state of Italy during the early modern period.

⁹ Sells, p. 211

¹⁰ Sells, p. 192.

¹¹ Sells, p. 212.

and heavy fighting frequently flared up throughout the first third of the new century. Only Tuscany enjoyed unbroken peace. War on Italian soil did not discernibly slacken until after the Treaty of the Pyrenees in 1659 which confirmed the ascendancy of France and subsequently marked a decline in Spanish authority and influence throughout the peninsula.¹²

Despite the constant flux of the Italian political scene and the chronic threat of war, most travelers to Italy in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries continued to visit the peninsula in large numbers, especially the inquisitive Englishman. The English interest in Italy and its classical past eventually culminated in the Grand Tour beginning in the seventeenth century, a conventionalized excursion made by young nobles accompanied by an appropriate guide, which followed an established itinerary primarily throughout the countries of France and Italy. The Grand Tour held multiple meanings for the English, and was particularly seen as a compliment to a university education or as a way of preparing a young nobleman for his future political or leadership role at home in England.

Historians studying early modern Europe also interpret the Tour in several ways. In *Haunted Journeys*, Dennis Porter portrays the Grand Tour:

"as a paradigm of travel undertaken to the center of a self-confident cultural tradition for the purposes of self-cultivation and the reaffirmation of a common civilized

¹² Sells, p. 39.

heritage"¹³

while John L. Lievsay, in *The Elizabethan Image of Italy*, defines the Tour as "the finishing touch to whatever education they earned at home",¹⁴ and Bruce Redford in *Venice and the Grand Tour*, presents it as "a dubiously rational enterprise of perfecting their Englishness by immersing themselves in the foreign."¹⁵

Contemporary critics of the tour, such as John Locke writing in the 17th century, attempted to warn parents of the many dangers and temptations existent in foreign countries, especially Italy. Travel by sea created a risk of being capture by pirates "chained to the oars of a Turkish galley or being sold as a slave in Constantinople."¹⁶ Moreover, the traveler had to watch out for bandits, the Inquisition, and jealous Italian husbands.¹⁷ Students at the University of Padua stalked the streets at night armed with guns making it hazardous for strangers to venture out after dark.¹⁸ Venice, a prominent stop on the Tour, featured the "most comparable achievements" and a perfect model of the republican state idealized by the English, yet "it was unbridled by corruption and liscense" (Carnival, brothels, etc.) and

¹³ Dennis Porter. *Haunted Journeys: Desire and Transgression in European Travel Writing*. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1991). p.19

¹⁴ Lievsay. p.2

¹⁵ Bruce Redford. *Venice and the Grand Tour*. (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1996). p. 1

¹⁶ Lievsay. p. 5

¹⁷ Italians were often stereotyped in literature as extremely jealous individuals who were also experts at the art of poisoning. This attribute will be discussed more fully later in this paper

¹⁸ Several travelers mention the dangers of Padua at night, because of its unruly student population, including Tobias Smollett, John Evelyn, Fynes Moryson, and Gilbert Burnet. "No night doth passe without murder."

perfectly capable of corrupting the young.¹⁹ And Rome presented the greatest danger of all as the center of Roman Catholicism, including "all the menaces of life, liberty, and salvation of Protestant Englishman."²⁰

Francis Drake provided a more optimistic view of travel:

"The great uses of traveling may be comprehensible in these few words, To raise in us new ideas, to enlarge the understanding, to cast off all national prejudices, to chuse what is eligible in other countrys, to abandon what is bad in our own, and lastly to learn to love our own happy island, by comparing the many benefits and blessings we enjoy above every other country, and climate, in the world."²¹

According to its proponents, the Tour contributed to the development of the individual and increased his usefulness to the state. Clare Howard in *English Travelers of the Renaissance*, explained that the tour had become "a way [for the individual] to serve his country" by writing an observation of his travels, because "contemporary history was scarce, [and] therefore of value".²²

The evolution of the Grand Tour began under the reign of Elizabeth I in the latter half of the sixteenth century. During this period, English travel was largely inhibited due to the illegality of foreign excursions without a royal license, yet at

¹⁹ Redford. p.7

²⁰ John Stoye. *English Travelers Abroad 1604-1667*. (New York: Octagon Books, 1968). p. 109 This paper will further discuss the emergence and vitality of the religious conflict within travel literature later on in the third chapter.

²¹ Redford. p. 14.

²² Clare Maclellan Howard. *English Travellers of the Renaissance*. (London, New York: J. Lane, 1914). pp. 38, 39

the same time the Queen "encouraged young men to go abroad , learn the language, and obtain a knowledge of Continental Politics"²³ The majority of English travelers to Italy before the turn of the century included those pursuing a foreign service career, such as Venetian ambassador Sir Henry Wotton, Catholic refugees seeking recourse from the atmosphere of intolerance perpetuated by the Reformation, and a few determined adventurers who managed to acquire the proper license.²⁴

Throughout Elizabeth's reign, the passion for travel among Englishmen rapidly expanded, and the demand for guidebooks and advice to young men increased dramatically. Yet Italy remained a dangerous place for Protestant Englishmen as long as Spain and England continued to war against each other.²⁵ The continuing conflict between the two states produced a climate of intense peril for the Englishman in Rome, making travel to Rome almost impossible. Only the most tenacious traveler, such as Fynes Moryson, could penetrate the city, view the notable sights, and escape without prosecution by the dreadful Inquisition. Moryson succeeded by donning a disguise, usually as a Frenchman or a German, and never staying in one place for too long. Others advised "avoiding the most dangerous cities, taking a disguise, avoiding own countrymen, and exercising prudent casuistry about

²³ Sells. p. 92

²⁴ For information on English ambassadors to Italy, including Venetian ambassador, Sir Henry Wotton, see A. Lytton Sells. Also see Sells and Clare Howard for comments on Catholic refugees from England during the Reformation and the threat of their presence in Italy to Protestant travelers.

²⁵ Another reason for the trouble was the excommunication of Queen Elizabeth in 1570 by Pius V as a response to the Reformation. This action subsequently also created a mood of anti-Italianism in England which will be discussed in a later chapter.

religious observation."²⁶

By 1604, peace treaties had been signed between England and Spain and soon all of Italy became open to the Englishman marking the subsequent development of a large scale tour. King Henry, as a matter of foreign policy, decided to open up the continent to all Englishmen and no longer required a valid license. The marriage of Charles to Henrietta Maria in the 1620's further facilitated English travel throughout the peninsula by smoothing relations between Catholics and Protestants.²⁷

By the 1630's a new phase of travel had developed, and evidence of a conventional itinerary had emerged. War and plague in northern Italy altered major routes taken by travelers of the previous period. Most travelers started at Marseilles, then traveled by boat to Genoa and Leghorn, and from Leghorn they went by coach to Pisa and Florence. After spending a significant period of time in Florence ordinary travelers headed for Rome by way of Siena. Rome now occupied the central ambition of the Tour, and after a quick stint at Naples, most travelers lodged at Rome for several months, or even years. English traveler John Raymond claimed in 1646 that "A man may spend many Moneths at Rome, and yet have something to see every day."²⁸ In another example, Edward Gibbon, writing a hundred years later in 1764, represented the height of the Grand Tour when he stated, "Rome is the greatest

²⁶ Stoye. p.110.

²⁷ Stoye. p.178.

²⁸ Sells, p. 212.

object of our pilgrimage."²⁹ All travelers aimed to spend Easter in Rome, and then crossed the Apenines mountains through Loreto, Ancona, and Bologna in order to reach Venice in time for Asencion. Finally, the majority of travelers returned home by way of Milan and the Simplon pass through the Alps to Geneva.³⁰

Travelers with higher aspirations than the standard tour often made several detours along the way. For those interested in learning, the University of Padua was renowned for its medical and science facilities, and the University of Bologna held distinction as a law school. The linguistically-inclined flocked to Siena "because the language is held the most pure."³¹ Those who desired a more extensive tour, such as Englishman George Sandys, set sail from Venice for an overview of the Holy Land and the Levant. Others, although very few, explored the southern-most parts of Italy, including Sicily.

In 1670, Englishman Richard Lassels first used the term "Grand Tour" in his innovative text *An Italian Voyage, or a Compleat Journey through Italy, In Two Parts*. His book attempted to redefine the English tradition of continental travel by focusing on the central role played by the teacher or governor who guided the young nobleman on his comprehensive journey through Europe. He claimed that "In travel we study 'the Great Book' of the world, and fit ourselves for the service of our country."³²

²⁹ Helen Barber Morrison. *The Golden Age of Travel: Literary Impressions of the Grand Tour*. (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1951). p. 444.

³⁰ Adapted from Stoye's generalized version of the Grand Tour.

³¹ Fynes Moryson. *Itinerary*. (New York: B. Bloom, 1967). p. 153.

³² Richard Lassels. *An Italian Voyage, or a Compleat Journey Through Italy, In Two Parts*. (Paris: John Strakey, 1670). p. 227.

He spent half of his lifetime abroad, including 'five voyages into Italy", and so he perceived himself qualified to give advice on travel and education. Lassels advised going to Italy prior to France, because Italians "neither eat or drink to excess...[exercise] good manners, [are] ambitious to honors, gentle and considerate, and courteous to strangers."³³ He also preferred "a year spent in Italy to get rid of the manners of Germany."³⁴ After learning language, music, painting, and math in Italy, he insisted, "[the young nobleman] will know what true use to make of France."³⁵

Lassel's guidebook exemplified an evolution in travel literature which ultimately led to the establishment of a new literary genre. Before 1600, most travelers never intended to publish their journals or letters, because a significant demand for guidebooks and recommendations for travel had yet to emerge. J.G. Links in *Travelers in Europe* argues that "only religion, sickness or a foreign university encouraged literary Europeans to travel", but after 1600 "they were drawn [mostly] by curiosity."³⁶

According to Mary Campbell in *Witness and the Other World*, travel literature did not develop into a full genre until well after the turn of the seventeenth century when the Grand Tour had become a viable force in Europe, however, prior to this century several texts such as those by Marco Polo, Columbus, and Mandeville, exhibited many of the emerging features of this new

29 Lassels p. 228.

34 Howard. p. 172

35 Lassels. p.228.

36 J.G. Links *Travellers in Europe*. (London: Bodley Head, 1980). p.155.

style of writing. These features included a first-person narrative, a sense of importance about the journey, and evidence of plagiarism. Both Campbell and Stephen J. Greenblatt (in *Learning to Curse*) argued that travel literature was largely ethnocentric and subjective due to the author's 'blind patriotism' to his mother country.³⁷

Travel literature regarding Italy from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries largely incorporated each of the features listed above. Whether giving advice to a nobleman about to embark on the Tour, transcribing letters to a friend, or composing a personal diary, each source wrote in the first person. Each author also expressed the profound importance of the purpose of his writings. William Lithgow began his text with a definitive statement:

"To the wise I know it will be welcome, to the profound Historian- yeeld knowledge, contemplation, and direction, and to the understanding Gentleman, insight, instruction, and recreation."³⁸

Proof of plagiarism also pervaded the majority of travel books during this period. Many travelers chose to replicate an especially good passage from the current guidebook when circumstances prevented them from viewing a particularly famous sight with their own eyes. Jean Dumont, the baron of Calscroon, in his *A New Voyage to the Levant*, decided not to recount the attractions of Italy, because of the remarkability of Monsieur

³⁷ Campbell and Greenblatt both provide an interesting narrative on travel and literature.

³⁸ William Lithgow. *Rare Adventures*. (London: Jonathan Cape, 1632). p. 19.

Misson's description (which he includes). Others admit to borrowing passages from previous authors, especially historical information, because many travelers were not adept in conveying the sights of Italy in the context of her ancient past.

In the beginning of the era of travel literature, most Englishmen merely chose to translate their German antecedents into English, but once prominent English travelers such as George Sandys, John Raymond, and Richard Lassels had submitted their fundamental texts, an English tradition of continental travelers rapidly blossomed. The descendants of this tradition consistently consulted, copied, and paraphrased the works of their predecessors. This process created an effective transmission of cultural ideas and attitudes about Italy in general throughout the early modern period.

In *Learning to Curse*, Greenblatt remarks that travel literature cannot be divorced from its historical circumstances, rather "intention and genre are as social, contingent and ideological as the historical situation they combine to represent."³⁹ Previously viewed as a backward people by the European continent, the growing status of England as a formidable power in the early modern period, especially at sea and in battle, constructed an English national sentiment and egoism. According to C. Leon Tipton in *Nationalism in the Middle Ages*, "England, isolated by the sea, developed an early consciousness of

³⁹ Stephen J. Greenblatt. *Learning to Curse*. p.112.

territorial unity."⁴⁰ Evidence of this ethnocentric attitude appears in Arthur Young's eighteenth century treatise, *Travels in France and Italy*. Young returns home to England with a profounder "love for our blessed Isle" after experiencing a detested foreign culture which he considered inferior to his own.⁴¹ In another eighteenth century case, Tobias Smollett's *Travels Through France and Italy* expressed his sincere opinion that England's current regime could stand against the status and prestige of ancient Rome, "I am still of opinion that we excel the ancient Romans in understanding the conveniences of life."⁴² In yet another passage, he advises the Genoese to cultivate a friendship with England, because as "masters of the Mediterranean" the English could quickly takeover the city of Genoa due to "the poor state of its fortifications".⁴³

The proud Englishmen became the chief travel writers in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, but what about the presence, or rather the lack of women authors and travelers? Only two of the secondary sources perused contained works by women, Campbell's *Witness and the Other World* and Lawrence's *Penelope Voyages*; and within the collection of primary sources women writers were conspicuously absent. Besides the usual argument that women lacked access to the public sphere, and therefore were generally restricted from participating in traditions of travel, why else

⁴⁰ C. Leon Tipton. *Nationalism in the Middle Ages*. Also see *The Nationalities of Europe and the Growth of National Ideologies and Citizenship and Nationhood in France and Italy* for definitions of nationalism.

⁴¹ Young, p. 120. Young provides an interesting case because he liked to criticize and complain about everything.

⁴² Smollett. p. 229. Smollett is also extremely critical and bad tempered.

⁴³ Smollett. p. 215.

did women not formally partake in the renaissance period of travel literature?

Lawrence attempted to resolve this question by citing Roland Barthe:

"Historically, the discourse of absence is carried on by the Woman. Woman is sedentary, Man hunts, journeys; Woman is faithful (she waits), man is fickle (he sails away, he cruises)...; thus man who waits and who suffers from waiting is miraculously feminized."⁴⁴

In other words, Lawrence argued, women exemplified the constant and embodied the home, but they also symbolized the foreign 'seducer' of young, innocent noblemen. Men assumed the role of protagonist, while "the female [was] mapped as a place on the itinerary of the male journey", just another obstacle on their path to enlightenment.

Lawrence's text reflected women's failure to produce non-fictional travel literature by focusing primarily on fictional accounts, the manifestation of women's desire to experience the intrigue and adventure of travel from the confines of the home. The few women who experienced and recorded actual travels usually did so because of exile or banishment. According to Lawrence, other women traveled within their imaginations by composing novels, romances, and letters. The exciting possibilities of the foreign and the unknown has enticed the curiosities of women as well as men throughout most of history, especially the tales of

⁴⁴ Karen Lawrence. *Penelope Voyages: Women and travel in the British Literary Tradition*. (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1994). p. 2.

ancient Rome.

Despite the difficulties presented by continuous warfare and conflicts over land; the threat of bandits, the Inquisition, and other dangers, travelers of the early modern period continued to visit the Italian peninsula out of an earnest curiosity and a certain longing for the ancient past. Englishmen in particular made Italy a main destination on the itinerary of their grand tour throughout Europe, a supplement to their education in order to mold them into great statesmen. These young noblemen wrote down a variety of impressions about the venerable peninsula resulting in the establishment of a new literary genre, the traveler's guidebook.

In their guidebooks, travelers advised others about the mandatory sights, Italian customs, prospective dangers, lodgings, the Roman religion, and the conditions of the cities and countryside. Many of these books relayed positive impressions of the peninsula and its people, but others expressed strong disappointment at the dismal conditions of this once great land. The following section will focus on the frustrations conveyed by various travelers within their writings and attempt to analyze why English travelers held certain expectations about Italy, and also why early modern Italy did not fully satisfy these ideals.

Chapter 2

"It was the prime praise of Ulysses that he had seen many cities, and known the manners or mindes of many men."⁴⁵

In 1641, James Wadsworth began his guidebook *The European Mercury* with a tribute to the great traveler of the ancient world, Ulysses. Like most early modern travelers, he had extensively studied and admired the adventures and triumphs of Ulysses and his successor Aeneas in the works of Virgil, Horace, and others.

The classical orientation of a seventeenth century education created an incentive to view the legendary sights of ancient Greece and Rome. For example, English traveler Joseph Addison admitted to using the classical texts as guidebooks on his tour of southern Italy in 1701.⁴⁶ Another Englishman and son of the Archbishop of York, George Sandys, also expressed an interest in the ancient world while completing his tour of the Holy Land and the Levant. Sandys visited several ancient landmarks in Italy, including: the Phlegrean Fields, site of an ancient pre-Roman

⁴⁵ James Wadsworth. *The European Mercury*. (London: I.R. for H. Twyford, 1641). Preface.

⁴⁶ See Joseph Addison. *The Golden Age of Travel*. ed. Morrison. (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1951). p. 400.

settlement; the amphitheatre of Pozzuoli, cited by Martial on the crimes of Nero and Domitian; and the cave of Sibyl, location of the famous priestess of Apollo as quoted by Virgil. For those travelers interested mainly in antiquities, the classical texts proved useful as a supplement to their descriptions of the vast number of ancient ruins and sights surrounding Rome.⁴⁷

Visions of Rome embodied to European noblemen, humanists, and explorers a dream of returning to a time of ancient dignity and glory. Their curiosity led them to indulge in the reading of numerous ancient documents, scrolls, and diaries. The descriptions of the most prestigious ancient sights, coupled by Italy's reputation as the center of the Renaissance movement and its distinction as a center of learning, painting, and sculpture, fed scholars' enthusiasms. Many travelers may have expected to uncover a great civilization untouched by the progression of time, or encounter enlightened men who would reveal a solution to life's greatest problems.

Some English travelers to Italy discovered a land which more than rivaled their expectations, but others wrote of their intense disappointment when the Italy they observed in reality did not parallel the Italy that they had imagined. Many criticized Italy's current situation: the obvious lack of trade and prosperity, and the dismal conditions of cities and towns. Others expressed skepticism and disgust at the mannerisms and practices of the people. Still others questioned how this once great land could

⁴⁷A. Lytton Sells, *The Paradise of Travelers: the Italian Influence on Englishmen in the Seventeenth Century*. (London: G. Allen & Unwin, 1964) pp. 172, 178.

have fallen into such ruin and despair. Compared to their own thriving English state which had just entered its own Renaissance, Italy appeared relatively impoverished and backward.

There were two exceptions to their view: The great state of Venice and the region of Tuscany received constant praise and admiration, even from the most adamant of critics. Venice remained the model form of government for Englishmen who compared the virtues of the great republic to the faults of their own government, especially in the era of Cromwell. Venice's successes at home and abroad, in war and in government, attracted the greatest admiration from English visitors and students of politics. A. Lytton Sells called Venice "the best polity in existence"⁴⁸, while William Lithgow further described it as "the Paragon of all Cities in the World."⁴⁹ The English respected the Venetian republic for its grand Arsenal, its unique atmosphere, and its mandatory education of the elite. As for Tuscany, travelers admired the region for its prosperous trade, its courteous and modest citizenry, "the beauty and security of the place, and the purity of the language."⁵⁰ Fynes Moryson confirmed this view in his statement:

"In the State of Florence, and especially at Sienna, a stranger may live more commodiously, then in any other part of Italy, because the inhabitants are most courteous (so as at Sienna they admit strangers to converse and dance with the chiefe Gentlewomen of the Citie) and because the language, especially at Sienna, is held the most pure, as

⁴⁸ Sells. p.106

⁴⁹ William Lithgow. *Rare Adventures*. (London: Jonathan Cape, 1632). p. 40.

⁵⁰ John Stoye. *English Travelers Abroad 1604-1667*. (New York: Octagon Books, 1968). p.120.

also for that victuals are very cheape, and strangers neede not stand in feare of being murdered, as in Lombardy they doe."⁵¹

Not only did Tuscany consist of gracious communities and a charming atmosphere, but it was also the only region of Italy to maintain relatively long periods of peace throughout the early modern period due to the prudent rule of the Medici family.⁵²

Yet even the eminence of Venice and the peacefulness of Tuscany could not compensate for travelers' shattered visions of a unified and civilized Rome, or their unfulfilled hopes of encountering a collection of enlightened and thriving city-states at the height of the Renaissance. In examining the grievances of seventeenth century English travelers and exploring the contradictions between the real and the imagined, it becomes evident that for many early modern travelers contemporary Italy would never compare to the images and echoes of the past.

When the inexperienced English traveler took his first glance of Italy, we can only wonder at his initial thoughts. Many of the journals and diaries of the early modern period communicated feelings of sheer excitement and anticipation strengthened by the browsing of hundreds of texts and pamphlets on Italy and ancient Rome, and the sharing of many exotic tales and stories of the renowned peninsula. For example, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, a German traveler writing as late as the eighteenth century,

⁵¹ Sells. p. 160.

⁵² Clare MacLellen Howard. *English Travellers of the Renaissance* (London, New York: J. Lane, 1914). p.15.

conveyed great pleasure at finally reaching the city of Venice:

"now it stood written on my page in the Book of Fate, that on the evening of the 28th of September, by five o'clock German time, I should see Venice for the first time... I should actually enter and visit this strange island-city, this heaven-like republic."⁵³

Of course, van Goethe's statement also reflected the Romantic notions of travel and history in the eighteenth century which were distinctly absent from seventeenth century accounts. Travel conveyed to eighteenth century Europeans a means of discovering one's place in the world and one's destiny. Nourished by an educational training to revere the classical world, travelers envisioned themselves in a historic time. van Goethe's dramatic entry indicated this revival of interest in history as well as a profounder love for Italy, one that could ignore the vices of the noblemen and courtesans, the wretched accommodations, the corruption in the Senate, and the general decline of the Venetian republic and the rest of the Italian peninsula from the height of its glorious past. But other men did not count themselves so lucky. Tobias Smollet, an eighteenth century English traveler, recounted his first impression of Italy:

"[we] ascended by a dark, narrow, steep stair, into a kind of public room, with a long table and benches, so dirty and miserable that it would disgrace the worst hedge ale-house in England."⁵⁴

⁵³ See Johann Wolfgang van Goethe. *The Golden Age of Travel*. ed. Morrison. (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1951). p.480.

⁵⁴ Tobias Smollett. *Travels Through France and Italy*. (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 1979). p. 208.

Smollet persisted in grumbling about the current state of Italy throughout his entire text, as did several others. According to these men, the inns fell short of the conveniences and comforts of home, the people failed in the spheres of civility, education, and religion, and the ancient sites lacked the luster and magnificence of the previous era. In their quest for Italy of the golden age, many early-modern travelers created a sufficient context in which they attained utter disillusionment with the Italy of their own time.

Most travelers were not at all prepared for the appalling conditions of the inns and other accommodations located throughout Italy. They assumed, at the very least, provisions would include a decent bed and meal, especially on the frequently traveled paths to Rome. Felicity Heal in *Hospitality in Early Modern England* discusses English society's cultural expectations concerning the behavior of an innkeeper or host. The English insisted that an innkeeper demonstrated "qualities of charitable giving and selfless openness to the needs of others." Heal further argues that these expectations rested on fundamental, cultural beliefs about the nature of relationships.⁵⁵

According to travel literature, Italian innkeepers failed to meet this criterion. The majority of travelers met with extremely unpleasant lodgings which they repeatedly conveyed in their diaries and other writings. Tales of large bugs and other vermin, windows without glass, foul-smelling bedding, filthy rooms,

⁵⁵ Felicity Heal. *Hospitality in Early Modern England*. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990) p. 23

tables, and dinner plates, and disagreeable innkeepers filled the pages of their texts.

In *Travels Through France and Italy*, Tobias Smollett provided an exceptionally graphic description of an unforgettable night in an Italian inn:

"The houses were abominably nasty, and generally destitute of provision: when eatables were found we were almost poisoned by their cookery: their beds were without curtains or bedstead, and their windows without glass; and for this sort of entertainment we payed as much as if we had been genteelly lodged and sumptuously treated... of all the people I ever knew, the Italian [innkeepers] are the most villainously rapacious."⁵⁶

Smollett concluded defiantly, "I was so sick of the wretched accommodations one meets with in every part of Italy."⁵⁷

Other travelers complained of: "a bed stuffed with leaves which made such a crackling, and did so prick my skin through the tick, that I could not sleep"⁵⁸, "a hideous hole... which would be too bad for hogs accustomed to a clean sty"⁵⁹, and "the bed-cloaths filthy enough to turn the stomach of a muleteer".⁶⁰ Gilbert Burnet, writing in 1641 and likely alluding to the innkeepers disrespect for his social position, added that "footmen in England would make a greivous outcry if they were no better

⁵⁶ Smollett. p. 294.

⁵⁷ Smollett. p. 306.

⁵⁸ J. G. Links. *Travelers in Europe*. (London: Bodley Head, 1980). p. 190.

⁵⁹ Arthur Young. *Travels in France and Italy During the Years 1787, 1788, and 1789*. (London & Toronto, J. M. Dent & Sons, 1915). p. 289.

⁶⁰ Smollett. p. 298.

lodged".⁶¹ Englishman John Evelyn, who visited Italy in 1644, mentioned the Mal Albergo which was equally "agreeable to its name".⁶² And finally Michel de Montaigne, a Frenchman of the late sixteenth century, paved the way for future travelers when he warned of the trickery of innkeepers who "even when you're completely careful, will keep you short of wood, candles, linen, or fail to supply the hay you have omitted to specify".⁶³ Still other travelers throughout the early-modern period emulated their predecessors in their lists of grievances, and added to a growing anti-Italian myth about the infamous innkeepers of Italy.

So why were conditions in Italian inns so deplorable? Italy's economic crisis in the seventeenth century which induced a decline in trade and the impoverishment of the people undoubtedly contributed to the poor state of their accommodations. The loss of export markets to the competition of cheaper products in northern Europe led to an irreversible decline in the Italian economy. Only industries directly related to the military managed to avoid ruination due to Spain and France's steady demand for weapons and artillery in northern Italy.⁶⁴ Innkeepers, and other shopowners, were forced to operate in a shady and conniving manner by taking advantage of wealthy and oblivious tourists, who had little concern for Italy's economic problems, in order to keep their businesses afloat.

In an age of laissez-faire economics in northern Europe,

⁶¹ Gilbert Burnet. *Some Letters...* (Amsterdam: for Widow Swart, 1688).

⁶² Links. p. 187.

⁶³ Links. p. 136.

⁶⁴ *Oxford History of Italy*. ed. George Holmes. (Oxford University Press, 1997). pp. 116.

English travelers were astonished by the Italian states' intervention in the economy and the levying of taxes which hindered commerce. In early-modern Italy, especially those regions under the domination of Spain, citizens were taxed more and more heavily to sustain the costs of Spain's wars in the Netherlands and northern Italy. These levy increases also overlapped with the commercial crisis of the early seventeenth century resulting in economic depression. The average citizen paid tribute, tolls, or customs on every item of trade or service.⁶⁵

In Fynes Moryson's *Itinerary*, he included a discussion on the taxes required by the proprietors of inns, hotels, and other lodgings. In Florence, Moryson observed that "whosoever brings the least thing into the citty to be solde, or carryes out the least thing bought, payes tribute at the gate."⁶⁶ In response, individuals discovered techniques for coping with the burden of taxes, such as concealing an item within their clothing, or if edible, consuming the object of taxation before leaving or arriving in the city. Innkeepers, accordingly, found ways to overcome the demands of taxation by cheating their customers or failing to maintain a clean or luxurious atmosphere. In reaction to this environment of exploitation, seventeenth century English author Sir Balthazar Gerbier advised nobles "not [to] expect from the Roman Prelars, the Hospitality of England."⁶⁷

Early-modern travelers also frequently condemned the

⁶⁵ *Oxford History of Italy*. p. 119.

⁶⁶ Fynes Moryson. *Itinerary*. (New York: B. Bloom 1967).

⁶⁷ Sir Balthazar Gerbier. *An Assitance to a Traveler...* (Oxford: for Robert Gascoigne, 1665). p. 101.

behaviors and practices of the Italian people. Many criticized the Italians for failing to resemble the learned humanists of the Renaissance or mimic the stature of their ancient ancestors. Travelers' assessments revealed problems of class and social status since most noble travelers encountered Italians of a lower status. Their judgments also reflected cultural expectations and notions of proper behavior which encouraged biased comparisons, especially among the English who began to see the Italians as backward. Regardless of their reasons, many travelers relentlessly attacked the Italians' character, humor and artistic taste, and educational and belief systems which will be discussed further in the next chapter.

Travel literature often portrayed the early-modern Italian as a notoriously jealous individual, who never shirked from his duty of revenge. This image was rooted in the literary tradition of Shakespeare which envisioned Italians as tempted by sex and driven by revenge. Guidebooks warned young noblemen, who often viewed travel as an opportunity for sexual exploration, about the dangers involved in crossing an especially suspicious Italian husband by seducing his wife. According to many writers, the art of poisoning remained an Italian forte, and a particularly daring young man might sustain his last breath at the hands of a crafty Italian. As one writer put it: "...these Italians are old dogs and will carry an injury a whole age in memory: I have heard of a box on the ear that hath been revenged thirty years after."⁶⁸

⁶⁸ John L. Lievsay, *The Elizabethan Image of Italy*, (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1964), p.7.

Travelers also depicted the Italians as arrogant and lazy. Boasting was seen as a "southern" Mediterranean trait. Several texts alleged that Italy's honorable past allowed future generations to brag and make absurd claims about their cities and their culture. Smollett remarked that:

"It is diverting to hear an Italian expatiate upon the greatness of modern Rome. He will tell you there are above three hundred palaces in the city; that there is scarce a Roman prince, whose revenue does not exceed two thousand crowns; and that Rome produces not only the most learned men but also the most refined politicians in the universe."⁶⁹

Many students, based on the grandiose image of Italy constructed within their studies, would have accepted the above claims prior to their journeys to the peninsula, but several seasoned travelers, like Smollett, eventually developed some animosity for the Italians and their "inflated egos". Travelers also condemned the Italians for their lethargy and inaction: either by declining to participate in the army or failing to improve the current state of the peninsula.

As for the Italian women, although considered by many writers as possessing a distinctive beauty and a sweet disposition, Tobias Smollett echoed the thoughts of several other travelers by classifying them as "the most haughty, insolent, capricious, and revengeful females on the face of the earth."⁷⁰ Like the men, Italian women, especially the Venetians, symbolized

⁶⁹ Smollett. p.259.

⁷⁰ Smollett. p. 230.

vanity and pride to their foreign observers. Several travelers commented on the objectionable dress of the Venetian ladies, which consisted of high-heeled shoes (Chapineys), hair set high with stones and silk flowers, and magnificent dresses."⁷¹ Others made fun of the Italians' taste in women, "grosse et massive, ... or big bust and breasts, as they like them."⁷²

English travelers heavily criticized the Italians' portrayal of women and viewed Italy as a place of double standards. With the development of a Puritan conscience in seventeenth century England, the English strongly valued self-control and sobriety, frowned on sexual promiscuity, and held marriage in the highest esteem.⁷³ As English travelers crossed national boundaries on the Grand Tour, sexual boundaries were also transgressed. In the early-modern period, Catholic/Italian culture did not value or maintain the same narrowly-defined sexual limitations as the Reformed Church in England.

In an age of sexual repression, English writers wrote critically about the general lack of chastity among Italian women, the multitude of prostitutes within the cities, and the widespread custom of the *cisisbeo*, the practice by married women of retaining a male friend. One traveler noted that:

"How strangely doth it appear to them that an Italian nobleman should prefer the company of a woman he married from affection, and think that there is any pleasure when he embraces

⁷¹ Sells. p. 200.

⁷² Link. p. 138.

⁷³ Vern and Bonnie Bullough. *Prostitution: An Illustrated Social History*. (New York: Crown Publishers, Inc., 1978). p. 132.

his children, in believing them his own."⁷⁴

As for chastity, travelers felt that both men and women were guilty for the decline of morals within their society. Fynes Moryson stated that "chastity is laughed at among them, and hissed out of all good company."⁷⁵ Authors of guidebooks alerted their young students to the dangers of desire throughout most of Italy, and the potential to be misled. As conveyed in Bishop Hall's *Sayings*, the famous "Curtizan of Rome, according to her profession, setting out herself to sale in the most tempting fashion" sought to capture young noblemen and corrupt their minds and souls before they had "reached mature age and judgment".⁷⁶ The Grand Tour was often popularized in English culture as a sexual and sentimental education for young noblemen, subsequently, the Bishop advised parents to refrain from sending their children out into the world before "too early ripeness".⁷⁷

In contrast to this perception, an alternate group of travelers chose to complain about the high costs of Italian prostitutes, especially those of Rome and Venice, and their joint protection by the city guards. French traveler Jean Dumont, baron of Calscroon, called Rome "the center of Whores."⁷⁸ Immersed in a foreign culture and removed from the pressures of societal mores inherent in their own culture, male travelers often sought the

⁷⁴ Young. p. 269.

⁷⁵ Moryson. p. 408.

⁷⁶ Bishop Hall. *Bishop Hall's Sayings*. (1660). front page.

⁷⁷ Bishop Hall. Front page.

⁷⁸ Jean Dumont, baron du Calscroon. *Nouveau Voyage du Levant. English*. (London: T. H. for M. Gillyflower, T. Goodwin, M. Wotton, J. Walthrow, and R. Parker, 1696). p. 12.

pleasure of prostitutes, and likewise, failed to observe the established sexual boundaries. In early-modern Europe, the existence of an ongoing debate between those who wanted prostitution completely outlawed for moral reasons, and those who demanded regulated prostitution consistently dominated city politics. Catholic adherents often quoted St. Augustine who saw prostitution as a means of curbing other sins, and a necessary institution to the unrestrained nature of men's desire. In contrast, the Reformed Church argued that prostitution encouraged men to stray from marriage, therefore they demanded its elimination.⁷⁹ These cultural differences are evident throughout travelers' writings.

If travelers evinced displeasure for the Italian moral character and Italian women within their texts, many alluded to an even stronger loathing for the Italian sense of humor in theater. Many travelers may have idealized the Italian art form, including theater, in their studies of the Italian Renaissance, but the experience of an authentic performance curiously induced some travelers to reject it within their writings, while making rough comparisons to their own comedies in England.

Italian *commedia della arte* reflected the current social conditions, customs, and moral tendencies of Italy. Most Englishmen failed to comprehend Italian humor, and several writers found it outright revolting. The English verbalized outrage at the scandalous presence of Italian women on stage. Once again, gender

⁷⁹ Bullough. p. 133.

lines were not observed, and the English, coming from a more conservative culture, found the porous nature of gender relationships obscene. A conflict developed within travel literature between English and Italian cultural ideas of gender, humor, and the stage. Gilbert Burnet, in the 1580's, saw a play that "would have been hissed off the stage in England", yet it received a satisfied reaction from Italians.⁸⁰ Two hundred years later, Arthur Young in Travels in France and Italy cited a particular line from a play to demonstrate what he considered the Italians' miserable wit:

"Chi e quel[lo] che ha la piu gran corona del mondo? Quello che ha la testa piu piccola!
(Who has the largest heart in the world? He who has the smallest head!)"⁸¹

Much to his surprise, Young asserted that this absurd joke received thunderous applause from the Italian audience. Other English travelers to Italy were also offended by the Italian's mindless humor and their tendency to cross social and moral boundaries on the stage, which also displayed the realities of Italian life in the early-modern period. They agreed with Young that Italian comedy lacked the quality and effectiveness that they had anticipated.

Unrestrained excitement and anticipation characterized those travelers intent on visiting the ruins of ancient Rome, but they too met with disappointment. Those who arrived in Rome with high hopes of viewing the ancient city in its glorious days often felt

⁸⁰ Burnet. p. 137.

⁸¹ Young. p. 245.

betrayed and lost at first sight of its decay and destitution. The early-modern city of Rome did not even fill the area within its walls, and the rest of the locale consisted of rubble and debris. The roads were badly paved and piles of litter occupied every corner of the city. Rome, la Sancta (the Holy) and Mundi Caput (Mother of the World), had indeed fallen. As quoted by William Lithgow, "Rome remained only a carcass of its former self."⁸²

Some travelers blamed Rome's current state on the failures of the Papal government, while others contributed the city's decline to the laziness of its people. According to travelers' observations, the lack of corn, wines, and cultivage; and the general barrenness of the land added to the pitifulness of Rome. Tobias Smollett in the eighteenth century found it "depressing because the idea of ancient cultivation and fertility is lost."⁸³ The area also remained largely unpopulated, and as stated by Gilbert Burnet in the seventeenth century, "people in ordinary towns in Scotland ma[d]e a better appearance".⁸⁴

Prominent sights and ancient ruins in other parts of Italy also received condemnation from dissatisfied travelers. Burnet expressed disappointment at the sight of weak towns renowned for their strength, while the decline of the great state of Venice disenchanting other travelers. Frenchman Jean Dumont noticed "the extreme decrease of the Power and Grandeur of this Republic since

⁸² Lithgow. p. 27.

⁸³ Smollett. p. 245

⁸⁴ Burnet. p. 146.

those glorious Days."⁸⁵ Fynes Moryson in the sixteenth century complained of the Piazza San Marco in Venice, "had it been paved with stone (rather than brick) it would have made the whole [thing] much more glorious and resplendent than it is".⁸⁶ Arthur Young, two centuries later, similarly found the Strada di Po of Genoa, famous for its straightness, "unlike its reputation as the finest [in the world]. [There are] fifty streets at London to which this cannot be compared."⁸⁷ In another instance, Young observed a prominent cathedral about which he complained, "I had read too much of the cathedral, and came to it with such expectation, that its effect was nothing."⁸⁸

Of course, not everyone professed despair upon viewing the conditions of early-modern Italy. While some travelers could have been classified as chronic complainers, others retained a sense of passion and energy which pervaded their writings as they searched for meaning in the ruins of the ancient city. This more optimistic breed ignored the inadequacies of Italy and failed to relegate the peninsula to an inferior position in favor of a more open-minded approach. For example, in an ode to Rome, Sir Balthazar Gerbier in 1687 quotes a poem by French poet Saint Amant: "Rome is no more, O worlds inconstancy! Marble hath there its fall. But what ruins away resists the time and all."⁸⁹ Enthusiastic traveler John Raymond declared, "I found that [Rome]

⁸⁵ Dumont. p. 105.

⁸⁶ Sells. p. 150.

⁸⁷ Young. p. 229.

⁸⁸ Young. p. 238.

⁸⁹ Gerbier. p. 94.

flourisheth beyond all expectation, this new even emulous to exceed the old, the remnants of the old adding to the splendour of the new".⁹⁰

Several travelers of the early-modern period delightfully discovered that the Roman ruins had not yet been excavated, and that underneath the masses of rubbish laid an entire complex of ancient buildings, statues, and other structures. In the eighteenth century, Arthur Young remarked that:

"time has swept their memories from the earth... yet here were wit and beauty, wealth and power, the vibrations of hope and fear; the agitations of exertion and enterprise, all buried in the silence of seventeen hundred years."⁹¹

Tobias Smollett, also in the eighteenth century, related a story of a friend and citizen of Rome who:

"lately digging to lay the foundation of a new house in the lower part of the city... discovered the pavement of an ancient street, at the depth of thirty-nine feet from the present surface of the earth."⁹²

How exciting it must have been to uncover the remains of the ancient city! Michel de Montaigne, writing earlier in the 1580's, also discovered the existence of ancient ruins beneath the rubble and buildings of early-modern Rome. He described Rome as "rien que son sepulchre", or completely dead and buried, like a tomb.⁹³

⁹⁰ Sells. p. 213.

⁹¹ Young. p. 247.

⁹² Smollett. p. 248.

⁹³ Margaret McGowan. "Contradictory Impulses in Montaigne's Vision of Rome." *Renaissance Studies*. (1990). p.392.

A friend of his "felt certain that in many places we were walking on the tops of houses still intact." Yet Montaigne opposed the eventual excavation of the ruins, because he doubted the compatibility between the real (the true state of the ruins) and the imagined (how people hoped the ruins would appear).⁹⁴

Despite the delight and great enthusiasm enjoyed by these travelers in finally reaching Rome, even they expressed a few gripes about the culture, government, or climate of Italy as compared to their ideals. For the most part, these grievances can be attributed to a strong attachment to their native practices and traditions, and a tendency to distrust the foreign. For others, widely read texts on the greatness of the ancient world and thinkers of Rome did not prepare them for the realities of early-modern Italy. Their disappointments consistently revealed themselves within the many journals and guidebooks of French, German, and especially English travelers to Italy. Some endless complainers, such as Arthur Young and Tobias Smollett became so disgusted with the conditions of Italy: its lousy accommodations, its disagreeable people, and its false claims of grandeur that they vowed never to return. As Smollett made his final departure from the peninsula, he remarked that he had chosen a felucca (boat) of a Spaniard "partly because he was not an Italian; for by this time, I had imbibed a strong prejudice against the common people of that country."⁹⁵

English critiques of the Italian people not only occurred

⁹⁴ McGowan. p. 398.

⁹⁵ Smollett. p. 305.

because of the differences in wit and disposition, but also due to the conflict of religion. In the aftermath of the Protestant Reformation and the subsequent Counter Reformation by the Catholics, English Protestants risked many grave dangers in their visits to Catholic Italy, primarily in those parts controlled by Spain and the Papacy. Forced to conceal their identities for fear of the Inquisition, several travelers devised means of eluding Catholic menaces in order to complete their tour of Italy. The next chapter will further discuss these religious themes, as well as introduce English denunciations of Catholicism based on their first-hand experiences in early-modern Italy.

Chapter 3

"XXXI Never any Pharisee was so eager to make a Proselyte, as our late Factors of Rome...or tell him he may as easily buy his sins as he may buy wares in the market.

XLII What Papist was ever heard to pray dayly in his Family, or to sing but a Psalm at home?

XLIII Who ever saw God's day duly kept in any City, Village, or Household under the Jurisdiction of Rome?"⁹⁶

In his published list of sayings, Bishop Hall echoed the heavy criticisms of his contemporaries concerning the corruption and contagious nature of the Roman religion. Rome, the foremost goal of most travelers in the early-modern period, remained off limits to the majority of northern Europeans. As a result of the religious situation in sixteenth century Europe, the Protestant Reformation and the Catholic counter-movement, anti-Protestant feelings developed in Italy, and similarly anti-papacy and anti-Italian sentiments flared up in England.

From the perspective of European historians, religion remained a major factor in the opposition or aversion to persons

⁹⁶ Bishop Hall. *Bishop Hall's Sayings*. front page.

of different backgrounds. Tipton emphasizes the importance of religion in his study of *Nationalism in the Middle Ages*. He claims that "people looked upon everything not from the point of view of their 'nationality' or 'race', but from the point of view of religion ... divided between Christians and infidels, true Christians and heretics."⁹⁷

In a final blow for would-be travelers, the excommunication of Queen Elizabeth in 1570 by Pope Pius V made visitation to Rome illegal for all English Protestants.⁹⁸ Newly reformed Protestant travelers now faced much more hazardous conditions when visiting the region of Italy than those encountered by their Catholic predecessors, including, a determined Spanish Inquisition which sought to root out all those guilty of "heresy" especially followers of the protesting sects. English travelers also feared the continuing presence of the English College in Rome, the betrayal by exiled English Catholics to the Inquisition, and finally the possibility of the dissemination of the Roman religion.

Despite the new dangers inherent in travel to Italy in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, many English travelers continued to visit the curiosities of the peninsula and also dictated their keenest observations about the sights, culture, and religion. Several themes emerged within the English texts which condemned Catholicism, especially: an attempt to rationalize the impossibilities of Catholic superstition and to show the Papists

⁹⁷ C. Leon Tipton. *Nationalism in the Middle Ages*. (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1972). p. 8

⁹⁸ John L. Lievsay, *The Elizabethan Image of Italy*. (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1964) p. 10

the error of their ways, a distinct fear of the Inquisition, and anti-clericalism coupled by a general critique of all Catholic religious displays and activities. Influenced by the religious fervour of the sixteenth century, English travelers in the early-modern period constructed observations about the Italian religion which reflected common themes in Protestant polemics against Catholicism.

In the spirit of the Protestant Reformation, many English travelers to Italy felt it their supreme duty to confront Catholic practices, to expose Catholicism's inherent defects through argument and reason, and ultimately to convert lost souls to the new faith. In the battle between reason and religion which continued to grow until the triumph of reason during the Enlightenment, travelers often combined the two issues in their efforts to diffuse Catholicism. Although highly determined in their crusade to proselytize the Catholics, most Englishmen returned home without success; yet they did express comfort and good fortune in avoiding the clutches of the Inquisition.

Gilbert Burnet, an English traveler writing in 1687, presents one example of the relentlessness of many English Protestants to rationalize the fallacy of Catholic notions. English travel literature, like religious literature of the early modern period, implied an intent to convert heretics to the true faith. Missionary efforts appeared in travel literature as one of the travelers' many motives throughout the journey. As a critique

of contemporary culture, travelers sought to expose the faults and weaknesses of non-Protestant sects within their writings.

In *Some Letters*... Burnet described his visit to the Church of the Apostle Saint Lucius in which he attempted to convince the local bishop, using historical facts, that the community belief in the coming of Saint Lucius was only a fable. In another account, a bishop told him the traditional story of Sister Saint Emerita who was burnt alive, and then showed him the remnants of her veil. Burnet responded somewhat lividly to this event in his letters:

"I confesse I never saw a relique so ill-dignified for it is a piece of worn linnen cloath lately washt, and the burning did not seem to be a Month old;...there were some there that with great devotion rubb'd their beads upon it."⁹⁹

Like Burnet, William Lithgow, another seventeenth century traveler, interpreted Catholic superstition with a critical eye, and hoped to correct the abuses, especially among his fellow Catholic Englishmen. He mentioned the scandal, ignorance, and vice of the popes all with the intention of exposing their shameful lives to the English Papists in expectation that they would change their ways. He listed some of the evils perpetuated by the popes in his *Rare Adventures*:

"Benedict IX wrought with enchantment, Boniface VII robbed Saint Peter's, Sextus IV committed sodomy, Leo X called the Gosple a fable, Gregory XII perjured, Clement V open whoremonger and snot, [etc]."¹⁰⁰

⁹⁹ Gilbert Burnet. *Some Letters*... (Amsterdam: for Widow Swart, Bookseller in the Beurs Stege, 1688). p. 55

¹⁰⁰ William Lithgow. *Rare Adventures*. (London: Jonathan Cape. 1632). p. 237

Other more zealous Englishmen openly pursued all non-Protestants within Italy for conversion, including Jews. Thomas Coryate foolishly attempted to openly convert some Jews in Venice in the early seventeenth century, and was fortunately rescued from the Inquisition by English ambassador to Venice, Sir Henry Wotton.¹⁰¹

Other travelers observed Catholic mores and practices in order to avoid persecution by the dreaded Inquisition. Many of these travelers returned from the Italian peninsula riddled with despised Catholic habits, such as crossing themselves or touching the holy water. In his *Itinerary*, Fynes Moryson, a late sixteenth century Englishman, recounted a dramatic moment when he accidentally displayed these inclinations in front of Father Beza, the successor to Jean Calvin:

"I walked with him [Father Theodore Beza] to the church [in Geneva], and giving attention to his speech, it happened that in the church porch I touched the poore man's box with my fingers and this reverend man soone perceived my errour, who having used in Italy to dip my fingers towards the holy water (according to the manner of the Papists, lest the omitting of so small a matter generally used, might make me suspected of my Religion and bring me into dangers of greater consequence) did now in like sort touch the poore man's box mistaking it for the font of holy water. I say, hee did soone perceive my errour, and taking me by the hand, advised me hereafter to eschew these ill customes, which were so

¹⁰¹ A. Lytton Sells, *The Paradise of Travelers: the Italian Influence on Englishmen in the Seventeenth Century*. (London: G. Allen & Unwin, 1964). p. 166.

hardly forgotten."¹⁰²

Due to the threat of the Inquisition and the possibilities for exposure, most travelers trusted no one during their journeys throughout Italy, even their own countrymen. The atmosphere of distrust pervaded travelers' texts and diaries as they donned disguises and wrote of clever schemes formulated in order to reach their destinations. They observed Catholic rituals and avoided the most dangerous spots. Jean Dumont, baron de Calscroon and a seventeenth century traveler from France, advised that a man must be on guard at all times due to the fact that "anyone could be an informer, Spies were of all Rank and Orders." He also warned travelers to maintain their silence, because the wrong comment or complaint could prove fatal. "The least offence exposes a man to the Severity of the Inquisition."¹⁰³

Another seventeenth century traveler, Englishman William Lithgow, expressed outright contempt for Catholic practices, and even ventured to call the Church "Babylonian whore, destined to fall due to sacrilege, incest, and villiany."¹⁰⁴ His comment echoed fourteenth century criticism of the Avignon church. His resentment stemmed primarily from his experiences with the Inquisition who had condemned him on a previous visit to Spain. After his escape from "the hunting of the blood-sucking Inquisition", a determined Lithgow swore he would unmask the vices

¹⁰² Fynes Moryson. *Itinerary*. (New York: B. Bloom, 1967). p. 181.

¹⁰³ Jean Dumont, baron du Calscroon. *Nouveau Voyage du Levant. English*. (London: T. H. for M. Gillyflower, et al., 1696). p. 351

¹⁰⁴ Lithgow. p. 30.

of the Church.¹⁰⁵

Lithgow's writings reflected great anger and frustration with the Church, but this growing hatred was actually built on a well-grounded fear of the "merciless" Inquisition. The Inquisition perpetually sought out heretics and condemned them to life imprisonment during the reactionary period of the Counter-Reformation. Fynes Moryson, one of the most experienced travelers of the late Elizabethan era (1591-95), declared that he was "in constant peril of the clutches of the Inquisition."¹⁰⁶ Clare Howard claims that due to Moryson's abilities and ingenuity he was able to, unlike less resourceful travelers, "in the character of a Frenchman [enter] the jaws of the Jesuit College at Rome.'

All places within Italy controlled by the Spanish and the Papacy remained extremely dangerous for Protestants, unless a traveler received protection from the English College in Rome. Travelers sought to evade the Inquisition in other ways as well, such as a disguise or by never staying too long in one place. These travelers, such as Moryson, overcame their fears and enjoyed the spirit of danger and adventure that accompanied a journey to Italy.

Other Englishmen, such as Anthony Munday, feared the betrayal of their countrymen. In his fictional account of *The English Roman Life*, Munday developed a conspiracy theory that stated:

"the lives of such Englishmen as by secret escape leave their own country to live in Rome, under the servile yoke of the Pope's

¹⁰⁵ Lithgow. p. 25.

¹⁰⁶ Moryson. p. 92.

government...practicing and daily looking for the overthrow and ruin of their princess and country."¹⁰⁷

Tales of international conspiracies extended the fear of Italians even to the English living in Rome. These fears linked Roman Catholic religious practices with a conspiracy to overthrow the Protestants.

Of course, the English papists had as much to fear back in England as the Protestants did in Italy. Most of the Englishmen and Scots who settled in Italy were refugees escaping England's discrimination against Catholics in employment, politics, and society. As Clare Howard notes in *English Travelers of the Renaissance, Roman Catholics in England*: "could be arrested for treachery, [endured] social isolation, were denied a share in Government, and were denied a profession. Many sought monasteries or wandered in exile through foreign courts."¹⁰⁸ Yet Fynes Moryson in the sixteenth century reminded readers of the English Catholic's treachery against their countrymen when he recounted his experience with an English priest, Cardinal Allen. When Moryson sought the Cardinal's protection, he received instead "a message from the Inquisition ordering his arrest."¹⁰⁹

Gilbert Burnet expressed a different kind of mistrust a hundred years later in *Some Letters*... when he accused the Church authorities of keeping suspect ancient relics from the eyes of

¹⁰⁷ Lievsay. p.11.

¹⁰⁸Clare MacLellen Howard. *English Travellers of the Renaissance*. (London, New York: J. Lane, 1914). p. 99.

¹⁰⁹ Sells. p.154.

Protestant skeptics. He stated:

"I was amazed to find none of any great antiquities, which made me conclude that either they were destroyed, that so the difference between Ancient and Modern rituals might not be turned against the Church, or that they were so well kept that Hereticks were not suffered look into them."¹¹⁰

Burnet's accusation of the Catholics' attempt to deceive the Protestants through the manipulation of evidence, hinted at an English tendency to detect danger or conspiracy even when the Catholics had committed no apparent wrongdoing. Protestant writers often incorrectly interpreted every Catholic act as a fallacy or a conspiracy, thereby subverting the truth and reality. In an environment of mistrust, based on a lack of understanding, strong suspicion emerged amongst English travelers. This suspicion confirmed a growing contempt for the Catholic institution, authorities, and practices.

Suspicion and hatred of the Roman religion stemmed from an English national sentiment, the fervor of the Protestant Reformation, and a strong pride in the state religion. In the early-modern period, state and church were indissolubly linked, so any opposition to the church was interpreted as a direct attack on the state and its people.¹¹¹ So in the sixteenth century, the Catholic Church's attempt to reassert its domination in Europe through the Counter-Reformation, which conveniently labeled Protestants as heretics, naturally produced an anti-papacy and

¹¹⁰ Burnet. p. 93.

¹¹¹ Tipton. p. 10.

anti-Italian mood throughout England. As stated by Clare Howard, "the Reformation called Italy a place of abomination; it divided nations and took away the common admiration for Italy which had made the young men of the north all rush together there."¹¹²

In an effort to prevent young noblemen from traveling to Italy, where they undoubtedly would adopt the bad habits of the Italian papists, the English government issued a decree in 1595 which restricted licenses for travel. The decree stated:

"do not haunte or resorte into the territories or dominions of any foreine prince or potentate not being with us in league or amitie nor yet wittinglie kepe companie with any parson or parsons evell affected to our state." ¹¹³

Following the events of the Spanish Armada in 1588, anti-Spanish and Italian sentiments intensified as English Protestants confirmed their superiority with exaggerated tales of their victory. The growth of the Black Legend soiled the image of both the Spanish and the Italians as primary advocates of the Catholic faith. Catholicism was seen as backwards and inferior to the triumphant Protestants, who God had assisted and revealed as His true followers. In the early seventeenth century, Lord Burghley consequently advised upper class parents:

"suffer not thy sonnes to cross the Alpes, for they shall learn nothing there but pride, blasphemy and atheism. And if by travel they get a few broken languages, that should profit them nothing more than to have one's meat served on divers dishes."¹¹⁴

¹¹² Howard. p. 72.

¹¹³ Howard. p.87.

¹¹⁴ Howard. p. 73.

Yet despite these somber warnings and the prevailing anti-Italian attitudes, most English travelers continued to set their sights on Italy.

In the intensifying atmosphere of anti-Catholic sentiment, early-modern travelers also composed numerous accounts which expressed anti-clericalism. Antonio Gabin, who published *Observations on a Journey to Naples Wherein the Frauds of Romish Monks and Priests are Farther Discovered* in 1691, traveled to Italy with the explicit intent of exposing the abuses of the Catholic Church. In the spirit of James II's Glorious Revolution and through careful observation and meticulous conversation, he aimed to show the superiority of the Protestant religion. Garvin expressed great displeasure with the religious men he met and conversed with. He reported in his *Observations...*, "What gross Ignorance many popes lived, of the most important Truths of the Christian religion!" After interviewing one particular pope he recalled that the Pope "wanted me to explain the Nature of Original Sin and how the Blessed Virgin came to be Exempt from it."¹¹⁵ His disbelief and apprehension towards the ignorance and foolishness of Catholic officials persuaded English readers to internalize negative feelings toward the Italian people and their religion.

Other English travelers persisted in criticizing Catholic priests for their preaching methods, rituals, and ceremonial traditions which the Protestant Reformation had sought to curtail.

¹¹⁵ Antonio Gabin. *Observations on a Journey to Naple*. (London: Samuel Roycroft, 1691). p. 3

They objected to reading and printing the Bible in Latin because it deprived the lower, uneducated classes direct access to God. Protestant travelers also condemned the worshiping of saints and relics which they found sinful and idolatrous. In his Sayings, Bishop Hall commanded his seventeenth century readers to:

"look into their churches; there their poor Laity hope to present their best services to God; And yet, alas, they say they know not what, they hear they know not what, they do they know not what."¹¹⁶

Arthur Young echoes Hall's critique one hundred years later when he condemned the Catholic practice of reading the Gospel:

"in a high Pulpit at the lower end of the Quire, that so it may be heard by all the people, though this is needless, since it is read in a language they don't understand."¹¹⁷

After nearly a century or more under the Reformed Church, these men could no longer comprehend, and therefore, despised the seemingly defective methods utilized by the officials of Catholicism.

Like most Protestants, Gilbert Burnet viewed Catholic devotion to saints and relics as idolatrous. In *Some Letters...*, he noted that even other Catholics found the Roman religion immoral, especially the excess and grandeur flaunted in the processions and other great visions of wealth. He claimed that, "A French Papist said to me that he could hardly bear the religion of Italy, the idolatry in it was so gross."¹¹⁸ Travelers viewed

¹¹⁶ Bishop Hall. front page.

¹¹⁷ Young. p. 90.

¹¹⁸ Burnet. p. 102.

idolatry and immorality as evidence of Catholicism's steady downfall.

In an effort to expose the ignorance and rampant sexual immorality of the clerical elites, Protestant travelers often described revealing encounters with guilty officials within their writings. Travel literature allowed writers to indulge in the greatest exaggerations in order to prove their point. In one example, seventeenth century traveler William Lithgow divulged an experience in which he saw the burning of a friar at Saint Mark's in Venice. The friar deservedly suffered "for begetting fifteen young Noble Nunnes with child, and all within one yeare, he also being their Father Confessor."¹¹⁹ Burnet similarly commented on the ignorance and vice of the clergy and their scandalous relationship with the nuns, who "are not vailed, their neck and breast bare, and they receive much company."¹²⁰ Two centuries later, Arthur Young repeated the same conclusions when he complained about the selfish ambitions of Italian priests "never to finish a great design that so by keeping it still in an unfinished state, they may be always drawing great donatives to it, from the superstition of the people."¹²¹ In Smollet's eighteenth century account of his travels to Italy, he dared to criticize Michaelangelo's famous pieta, a symbol of Catholic patronage and superstition resident in Saint Peter's Church, by pointing out that,

"the figure of Christ is as much emaciated, as

¹¹⁹ Lithgow. p. 38.

¹²⁰ Burnet. p. 118.

¹²¹ Young. p. 88

if he had died of a consumption: besides, there is something indelicate, not to say indecent, in the attitude and design of a man's body, stark naked, lying upon the knees of a woman."¹²²

The loathing of Catholic officials also extended itself to particular sects, especially the Jesuits. In the early modern period, the Jesuits had risen to a position of power and influence amongst the Catholic people, particularly in the countryside, and also within the Church. They ran the schools, bought and sold property, operated estates, and pursued other methods of earning a profit which generated universal hatred from both Catholics and Protestants. English Protestant travelers echoed typical concerns and characteristic fears of the Jesuits. Gilbert Burnet, in the seventeenth century considered the Jesuit practice of selling wine and other products "unbecoming men of that profession."¹²³ William Lithgow called them "flatterers, bloody-gospellers, and tale-tellers."¹²⁴ Sir Henry Wotton, ambassador to Venice in the seventeenth century, informed his countrymen of the horrific plan by Jesuits "to thus separate their tutors from young men and then ply the pupils with attention and flattery, with a view to persuading them into the Church of Rome."¹²⁵

Anti-clericalism, fears of the Inquisition, and missionary objectives characterized English travel literature of the early-modern period. Travelers criticized Catholic ritual and doctrine,

122 Smollett. p.266.

123 Burnet. p. 157.

124 Lithgow. p. 232.

125 Howard. p. 80.

ceremonies and relics. Still, many travelers journeyed to Italy in order to view the ancient sights and landmarks of the Roman Empire. Despite efforts to avoid Catholic centers or to blend in with the locals, Protestant travelers constantly risked religious persecution throughout their tour of Italy.

Fortunately by the 1630's, a greater tolerance arose for English travelers in Italy, particularly after the marriage of the English king, Charles, to French Catholic princess Henrietta Maria. The curious arrived in large numbers as the itinerary of the Grand Tour began to evolve. Yet Protestant travelers still expressed within their writings negative feelings towards the Italian Church, its people, and its practices. This anti-foreign sentiment, built on the notions of an emerging sense of nationalism which still tightly bounded together the entities of church and state, prevailed throughout the early modern period.

Conclusion

"Travel itself is imaginative: travels are fiction to the extent that the traveler sees what he wants or expects to see, which is often what he has read."¹²⁶

Stoye's quote from *English Travelers Abroad* sums up the predominant themes found within travel literature of the early modern period. Travelers described Italy as they saw it, and also as their predecessors saw it. On their continental journey, or grand tour of Italy and France, travelers often carried a prominent guidebook and an ancient classical text to accompany them. Readers digested the advice of their guidebooks, and often copied passages word for word into their own texts. Readers also strongly believed in the images and perceptions posed by the

¹²⁶ Stoye.

recently revived ancient authors which described a once great civilization centered in Rome. This combination of influences created for most English travelers an accepted yet conflicting picture of Italians: the admirable Italian descendant of the ancient Roman Empire, but also the sinful Papist determined to lure young noblemen into the clutches of Catholicism.

In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, travelers discovered novel ways to evade the designs of the dreaded Spanish Inquisition in order to succeed in their objectives, while consistently criticizing the Catholic state and cultural practices within the confines of their journals. Those who dared to express their opinions outside of the safety of their writings, often risked persecution, imprisonment, or even death. This sense of danger gave vibrancy to their writings and intensified the demonization of the Italian church and culture.

Who were these Italians, and how did they live? How did their abilities compare to an Englishman's? English travelers described Italian culture and practices from a distinct point-of-view. During the seventeenth century, England was in a period of turmoil. Intensified fears of the Catholic menace following the Glorious Revolution projected negative feelings towards the Italians. As England grew into a dominant power in Europe, the Atlantic, and eventually the New World through imperialistic and colonial methods, an English national identity was formed. This development of a national identity, which was explicitly tied to religion, and the subsequent growth of nationalism in early modern

Europe, created feelings of superiority which were reflected within travelers' descriptions of foreign lands. Several writers declared that England could easily beat Italy in a naval battle, while others insisted that accommodations, manners, and learning in England were far superior to those in Italy. These prejudices sketched an Italy full of ancient culture and art, but devoid of any contemporary power or value. Armed with cultural, national, and religious biases common to the era, English travelers created within their texts an Italy which was unrefined, corrupt, and politically and economically backwards.

Of course the true Italy, despite the ravages of war and the dipping economy, still retained much of its prestige as a prominent place of learning and gentility. The University of Bologna still attracted great teachers and scholars. Italian art and opera was highly admired. Beautiful noblewomen graced the streets of Florence and Venice. The Counter-Reformation transformed the Catholic Church and reestablished its power in Europe. In the seventeenth century, work had also begun on digging out and preserving the ancient Roman ruins.

So, despite the criticism and denigrations expressed by a few prejudiced English travelers of the early modern period, Italy remained a cultural center, a mecca, within the Christian world, and its attractions continue even today.

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