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Introduction*

Goethe grew up with a father whose most important formative experience—at least to hear Goethe tell it—had been an extended trip to Italy after the completion of his legal studies. That Johann Caspar Goethe had been to Italy was something rather unusual for a young bourgeois gentleman in the first half of the eighteenth century. Young aristocrats might include Italy on their cavalier's tour, that rite of passage which put the final touch to their social polish, their manners, and their culture, if they planned a really extensive trip. Otherwise they headed for Paris. From the early Renaissance on young artists too went to Italy to receive instruction from the acknowledged masters and to experience Europe's largest store of inspiring artworks. In the mid-eighteenth century it was unusual for German Protestants, apart from artists and archaeologists, to travel in Catholic Italy. There was absolutely no pressing reason for Johann Caspar Goethe to visit Italy around 1740.

Yet Goethe's father, already demonstrating at an early age the stout independence that marked him throughout his life, had been to Italy and had made the most of it. His house was filled with mementos of the journey: pictures, books, small artworks. He had learned to speak and write Italian well and had composed an extensive account of his journey in Italian. He held up Italy as an ideal and imposed it on his children in the form of language lessons, stories about his Italian journey, and the aspiration for his son to follow in his footsteps and visit the country himself at an early age. He was prepared at practically any time to send young Wolfgang Goethe off to the south for his final polishing.

Yet Wolfgang did not gratify Johann Caspar by traveling to Italy

*See also the general introduction to Goethe's autobiographical works in Volume 4.

during his father's lifetime. On two occasions before his departure for Weimar in the fall of 1775 he either had the opportunity or even intended to do so—but on both occasions he held back, or was held back by the feeling that it was not yet time. In June of 1775, on his first trip to Switzerland, he climbed up the St. Gotthard pass and looked down on Italy. His companion urged him forward, but he refused to go on and returned to Zurich and Frankfurt. In the fall of the same year, when he had long waited in vain for the carriage that was to take him from Frankfurt to Weimar, he resolved—at his father's urging—to forget about Weimar and head for Italy instead. He started on his way and got as far as Heidelberg before a dispatch rider sent from Frankfurt caught up with him to convey apologies for the delay and a renewed, even more urgent invitation to proceed to Weimar.

It was to be almost another eleven years before Goethe finally realized the dream of Italy. Those years were devoted to hard work in government administration as perhaps the closest friend and one of the chief advisers and functionaries of Duke Carl August, seeking to influence the ruler and help modernize the Weimar and Eisenach territories. For all the dedication and good will Goethe brought to the task of government, he was bound to feel considerable frustration over the difficulty of transforming rulers by persuading them, or mankind by governing it in an enlightened manner. In those eleven years he came more and more to feel that by using himself up in Carl August's service he was depriving himself both as an artist and as a human being. His cultural accounts were in deficit and he had had no time or opportunity to grow. He had not yet discovered his true calling as a man of letters and still suffered under the illusion that he had considerable untapped ability in the visual arts. His emotional life had become onesided and unfulfilling—one may even say stunted—by his long-term Platonic relationship with Charlotte von Stein, with whom he discussed his soul daily without enjoying any sensual gratification whatsoever.

Goethe's departure for Italy in 1786 had every appearance of a flight from unsatisfying Weimar reality to an almost mythical promised land. Italy was appealing because of its climate: it was the South, where nature was free to be itself instead of constantly being under pressure and constraints as in the North. Here were the treasures of Renaissance painting and sculpture and the cultural and architectural legacy of Rome. In the northern European mind Italy had come to be invested with the attributes of "Arcadia" as well. Strange as it may seem to us today, in the eighteenth century Italy came to function as the repository of the Greek ideal, an attitude sanctioned and nurtured by Winckelmann's enthusiasm for the remains of Greek antiquity he had encountered in Rome and points south. Travel to Greece was extraordinarily difficult, however, as all of Europe east of Venice was ruled by the Turks, who

were continually at war with the Mediterranean Christian countries. Only privileged and hardy citizens of nations that had good relations with the Porte—primarily England and France—could ever hope to become familiar with the extensive remains of the Greek and Hellenistic civilization that had flourished in the eastern Mediterranean until Roman imperial times. Anyone else who ventured into the Mediterranean had to keep an eye out for pirates and raiders—dramatically illustrated by Goethe himself when, on his return trip from Sicily to Naples, he opted to travel on a neutral French ship. Northern Europeans in general—like Winckelmann and Goethe—had to settle for what they could find of Greece in Rome, southern Italy, and the once-flourishing Greek colony of Sicily. Idealizing what they found there, even though it was often only Roman copies of late Greek works that they encountered, they made serious blunders in their historical treatment of Greek art—epitomized by their enthusiasm for the Laocoon group, a late Hellenistic work. One will seek in vain in Goethe's *Italian Journey* for any similarly fervid appreciation of Roman visual art, yet his (and other Germans') appreciation of Greek art was still stamped by Rome.

Goethe had been vacationing in Carlsbad since late July 1786 in the company of Charlotte von Stein, Carl August, Johann Gottfried Herder and his wife, and other less intimate acquaintances. Charlotte left the Bohemian spa on August 14. After staying long enough to celebrate Goethe's thirty-seventh birthday on August 28, Carl August also left. Having asked the duke only in very general and vague terms for an "indefinite leave," Goethe stole away from Carlsbad at three in the morning on September 3 without telling anyone where he was going. Only the servant he left behind knew what his master had in mind. He hurried through Bavaria and Austria, over the Brenner Pass into the Tyrol, through Bolzano and Trent, Verona, Vicenza, and Padua before stopping to catch his breath at Venice. He wrote home for the first time from Verona, sending letters by way of his servant in Weimar without giving the recipients any hint of his whereabouts. It was not until he had arrived in Rome that he revealed his destination and his plans. Herder understood his need to get away from home in this fashion and for an extended period of time. Charlotte was less satisfied with her soulmate. Faced with a *fait accompli*, Carl August did not demand that Goethe return home soon. If he had had to say what he intended to do before he left, Goethe would probably never have gone. As it turned out, however, he was to enjoy almost two years in Paradise, coming to terms with himself and refreshing himself for the rest of his life. It was not nostalgia alone which later led Goethe to claim more than once that he had never again really been happy since leaving Rome, and his citation of Ovid at the conclusion of the *Italian Journey* reinforces that lament.

In Rome Goethe concealed himself under the incognito of “Filippo Miller, painter.” Only the artist Wilhelm Tischbein knew at first who he really was. In the long run it was not possible to preserve his incognito at all times, and Goethe gradually became acquainted with a circle of fairly sophisticated people who could accept him on his own terms, the principal ones being Councilor Reiffenstein, Angelica Kauffmann, Karl Philipp Moritz, and Heinrich Meyer. The only reason for the incognito one can deduce from the *Italian Journey* itself is that Goethe wanted to avoid being identified and pestered everywhere as the author of *The Sorrows of Young Werther*, as which—due to the fact that he had published nothing significant since 1774 to erase or modify that first impression of himself—he was still notorious. Equally obvious, however, is the fact that as a high Weimar official who had recently been ennobled (1782) he would have been under considerable pressure to lead a very different life in Italy, had his identity become generally known. He would have had to frequent aristocratic circles and he probably could not have totally escaped becoming involved in diplomacy and affairs of state, since this was a period of *rapprochement* between post-Friderician Prussia—with whose policy Carl August increasingly became aligned—and Rome. (In fact, Goethe had not stolen away from Germany as cleanly as he thought: the Austrian intelligence service kept an eye on him while he was *en route* to Rome, suspecting diplomatic intentions on his part.) As it was, Goethe was charged on several occasions with representing his master’s interests in Rome, he received communications through Prussian diplomatic channels and presumably was fairly well informed about affairs, and during the last months of his stay he was involved in the planning for Dowager Duchess Anna Amalia’s trip to Italy in the fall of 1788.

What Goethe sought by remaining incognito was above all the opportunity to mingle and live with his own kind—artists—and to be his own man for an extended period of time. One could say that he was intentionally descending below his attained social class, renouncing his privileges whenever and as long as it pleased him to do so, and returning to his origins as an artist. In the pressure-free atmosphere he created for himself in this way he was free to grow in whatever direction he could. The pages of the *Italian Journey* are dominated by three major themes: the observation of nature and his efforts to formulate a law for the metamorphosis of plants, the progress of his writings for the eight-volume edition of his collected works he had contracted to put out with the Berlin publisher Georg Joachim Göschen, and above all his encounter with Renaissance art and the cultural monuments of antiquity. In the course of 1788, after the arrival in Rome of the Frankfurt-born musician and composer Philipp Christoph Kayser, music and work on his operettas also played a considerable role in his life. He summed

up the effect of his Italian experience by claiming that in Rome he had learned to see for the first time. The encounter with the South, together with the freedom to pursue his inclinations to the point of fulfillment or to the point of certainty that fulfillment was impossible for him, led Goethe to proclaim that he had experienced a rebirth and even to feel that he had not really lived before arriving in Rome.

Goethe had sketched and dabbled in the visual arts all his life. Until near the end of his stay in Italy he struggled with his artistic talents and sought to develop them to the fullest. When he set out he still believed he possessed as much talent for the visual arts as for letters, only that this talent had never been developed the way his writing had. By the end of the second sojourn in Rome he finally admitted to himself and others that he had been mistaken and he had discovered that his true calling was to be a writer and a scientist. He renounced his ambitions in the visual arts and returned to Weimar full of ideas for literary and scientific projects that were enough to occupy him for years. He retained a lively interest in art and art history and even succeeded in getting the art historian Heinrich Meyer to settle in Weimar soon after his own return home, but he knew now once and for all that he was only an art lover and connoisseur, not a creative talent. Though of course a source of great disappointment to him, Goethe's realization that he was not destined to paint with oil on canvases was a salutary one—perhaps the greatest benefit of the Italian experience both for himself and for the history of German literature. However, the Italian experience had something of a negative effect on his life after returning to Weimar: the personal development Goethe had undergone and the insights he considered himself to have gained in Italy began once and for all to set him apart from other German intellectuals. Once back in Germany he began to feel himself more and more isolated. The productive friendship with Friedrich Schiller from 1794 to 1805 was a boon to him, but proved to be only an episode in the process of his estrangement from much of Weimar society and German intellectual life.

From the outset of his trip Goethe intended to write and talk about the Italian journey when he got back to Weimar. He kept a detailed diary of the trip from Carlsbad to Rome, which he sent back to Charlotte von Stein in installments with the suggestion that she should transcribe it in a large format, leaving out everything that was directed to her personally and might not be fit for others to hear or read. He hoped upon his return first to fill in the details and explicate his experiences for her at greater length—after all, the diary was mainly for *her*—and then to share it with others in one form or another as well. During the two stays in Rome he did not keep an extensive diary, but he wrote numerous quite detailed letters—above all to Charlotte, the Herders, and Duke Carl August. During the trip to Naples and Sicily in early

1787 he again kept a detailed diary and wrote letters as well. Upon his return to Weimar in the summer of 1788 he asked to have back the diary for Charlotte and the letters he had written to her and his other friends, with the intention of using them to write about his Italian journey. (Of all these materials, only the diary for Charlotte and the letters from the first stay in Rome still survive—Goethe later destroyed most of the diaries and letters which formed the basis for the Naples-Sicily part of the *Italian Journey* and the treatment of his second stay in Rome.) Yet he did not finally write about the journey itself until much later, and when Herder asked to borrow the travel diary in preparation for his own journey to Italy Goethe refused to let it out of his hands on the grounds that it lacked substance. He published a dozen or so articles and essays on various topics in Wieland's *German Mercury* in 1788 and 1789, a little illustrated book on the Roman Carnival, and a paper on Count Cagliostro, but he did not write about the journey itself and his Italian experiences until he was already rather far along with the project of writing his autobiography.

Towards the end of 1813, after he had completed the first three parts of *Poetry and Truth*, Goethe began working on the diary of the Italian journey. By the summer of 1814 he was able to announce to his publisher, Friedrich Cotta, that printing could begin in the fall. Yet other projects interfered and it was not until the summer of 1816 that the manuscript of the first part of the *Italian Journey* could go to the printer. The first volume, ending with the departure for Naples in February 1787, appeared in November 1816. The second volume, ending with the return from Naples to Rome at the beginning of June 1787, followed fairly soon afterward in October of 1817. These two volumes combine travel narrative with letters to friends at home. They are similar in character and form and are based on the voluminous raw materials in Goethe's possession—the diaries and the letters he had written to his friends. At their first publication both went under the general title "From My Life," like *Poetry and Truth*. When they were republished in the final authorized edition of Goethe's collected works (the "Ausgabe letzter Hand") they received the simple new title, "Italian Journey," parts I and II. This sets them off from the last part of the work dealing with Goethe's second stay in Rome from June 1787 to April 1788.

The last part of what we today call the *Italian Journey*, but to which Goethe gave a different title—"Second Sojourn in Rome"—and apparently did not regard as part of the "Italian Journey" as such, has a completely different character. Some would also feel that it is inferior to the first two parts. Goethe did not complete it until 1829 in conjunction with work on the "Ausgabe letzter Hand." Its form and content were in part dictated by the disposition of the works in the "Ausgabe letzter Hand" and it was first published in that edition. Working without

the benefit of an extensive diary for this part of his stay in Italy, Goethe apparently felt that the letters he had in his possession were not enough by themselves to provide the richness of experience and texture that characterize the first two parts of the work. He therefore resorted to a new format, seeking to compensate for the lack of diary material by introducing a month-by-month narrative “Report” following the correspondence for each month. He also resorted to including materials from other sources, for example letters by Wilhelm Tischbein, essays by Heinrich Meyer, and an extract from Karl Philipp Moritz’s essay *On the Creative Imitation of Beauty*. Finally, he included in the account of the second stay in Rome some materials for which there was no longer any logical place elsewhere in the “Ausgabe letzter Hand” (most of the essays from the *German Mercury* had already been published in a previous volume). The most prominent instances of this are the essay on St. Philip Neri, which he only completed in 1829 while working on the volume, and the *Roman Carnival*. The *Second Sojourn in Rome* thus became an archive of Goethe’s experience and of the products of that experience rather than the straightforward and, on the whole, probably more satisfying account of the experiences and thoughts of the Italian sojourner produced in the first two parts of the work published in 1816 and 1817. There is often a certain amount of repetition between what is presented in the correspondence and what is narrated in the “Reports,” and, whereas the first two parts of the work generally manage to give the impression of recapturing the immediate experience of 1786–1787 with a minimum of intrusion by the author who is editing his experiences from the viewpoint of 1816–1817, the *Second Sojourn in Rome* contains numerous lapses in perspective and later editorial comments. Writing more than forty years afterwards, the later Goethe often intrudes visibly on his former self.

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