CHAPTER 1

YOUNG GENTLEMEN
ON TOUR

JAMES BOSWELL, one of the most celebrated travelers of the eighteenth century, was simply a rebellious youth of twenty when he left home for the first time, seeking escape from his father, his legal studies, and what seemed to him the stultifying provincial life of Scotland. Like many privileged young men of his generation, Boswell occupied the years between university and career with an extended tour of continental Europe, a rite of passage intended to supplement a young man’s formal education and provide him with some experience of the world—a sort of mobile finishing school for young men. For many of these young men, Boswell included, this so-called “grand tour” also provided a socially acceptable form of escape, a way of sowing wild oats, in the parlance of a later time. Historical hindsight demonstrates that Boswell was a far more talented and perceptive observer than most young grand tourists, but at the time he was very much like them: young, rich, well educated in the classical tradition of the time, immature, a bit rebellious, yet perfectly well aware of the social role expected of him as an adult.
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If he was perhaps more seriously at odds with his family than most of his contemporaries, and more inclined to agonizing self-doubts (many of them committed to paper), he nevertheless serves as a quite typical and highly entertaining guide to the young gentleman’s grand tour.¹

The son of a prominent Edinburgh judge and heir to the estate of Auchinleck, near Glasgow, Boswell was expected to follow his father into the law after completing his undergraduate studies at Edinburgh College. Young Boswell, however, found literature more to his liking, and took to spending most of his evenings at the theater. When he became intimate with a Roman Catholic actress and began reading religious tracts that she and her priest gave him, Alexander Boswell—whether more appalled by the young woman’s profession or by her religion is hard to say—packed his son off to the university at Glasgow, where he could continue his legal studies away from the nightlife of Edinburgh and closer to the Auchinleck estate. After five months in Glasgow, Boswell rebelled and ran off to London, apparently with the intention of joining the Catholic Church and becoming a monk.

Unable to travel to London himself to reason with his son, Alexander Boswell asked a friend, the Earl of Eglinton, to look after young James. Eglinton complied, although not in quite the way that the elder Boswell might have hoped. The best way to rid a headstrong young man of religious delusions, Eglinton believed, was to distract him with the pleasures of city life; he took Boswell to parties and the theater and introduced him to women and notable men like the Duke of York and Laurence Sterne. As Boswell’s biographer later put it, Eglinton “salvaged him from Romanism by making him a Deist and a rake.”¹¹ Eglinton also suggested that Boswell seemed better suited to a career in the military than the law, prompting James to write his father asking that he purchase a commission in the Foot Guards, a regiment permanently stationed in London. This was enough to bring Alexander Boswell to London to escort his son home.²

Alexander vetoed the Guards scheme, recognizing it for what it was—a ploy to stay in London—and insisting instead that James return to his legal studies, this time under his father’s supervision.
For two years James lived at home in open rebellion against his father, spending as much time as possible writing, attending the theater, and engaging in affairs with various women. He did manage to learn enough to pass the examination in civil law, however, and finally his father agreed to let him go to London and use whatever influence he could muster to obtain a commission. In November 1762 Boswell returned to London with a modest allowance from his father. Securing a commission proved difficult, however, and after several months Boswell was no closer to a career decision. His father renewed the pressure to come home and take up the law. Once again, father and son reached a compromise: James would spend a year in Holland studying law and then take a few months to travel on the Continent. The two men had rather different ideas about a proper itinerary and fit subjects of study for a Continental tour, however, so toward the end of his year in Holland, James was arguing with his father again. This time, Alexander offered his son a choice between touring the German courts and traveling through Flanders to Paris, with the goal in either case of observing court life and politics in other nations. James, on the other hand, dreamed of going to Italy. But his father thought Italy and France, other than Paris, a waste of time—the former because of its "intoxicating" effect on young travelers and the latter, as he told James, because "there is nothing to be learned by travelling in France."13 Alexander Boswell's attitude, that travel was worthwhile only if educational, was a common one at the time. Even the grand tour, with its primarily educational goals, was suspect among many people, who questioned the value of turning young men loose in unfamiliar surroundings with nothing more than a tutor and some servants as chaperons—and with good reason, as gambling and whoring were common enough pastimes among grand tourists. Others simply thought the educational value of travel was wasted on the young.4 Notwithstanding the critics, however, by the middle of the eighteenth century the Continental tour, which had its origins among the British aristocracy in the sixteenth century, had expanded to become a common experience among the sons of wealthy professional and mercantile families—men like Horace Walpole, son of Robert Walpole, the British prime minister, who toured the Continent in the
early 1740s with his friend the poet Thomas Gray; Edward Gibbon, dispatched to Switzerland in 1753 to study with a Protestant minister after his father discovered that his son had surreptitiously converted to Catholicism; William Beckford, heir to a man who had made his fortune raising sugar in the West Indies and retired to live the life of a country squire in England; and Tobias Smollett, who first traveled to the Continent as a young man in the 1740s and returned with his family in 1763, this time seeking a more healthful climate to relieve the symptoms of tuberculosis.

These were just a few of the thousands who made the grand tour in the eighteenth century. The numbers ebbed and flowed as periods of war made any nonessential travel advisable; the Seven Years’ War (1756–63), in particular, cut off British access to the Continent. From 1763 until the French Revolution, however, the number of people crossing the Channel increased dramatically, with only a brief decline in the late 1770s and early 1780s, when France and Britain were once again at war. In 1785, an acquaintance in Switzerland told Gibbon that 40,000 English men and women were touring the Continent that year, while a newspaper report about a year later claimed that 3,760 English tourists had arrived in Paris during one six-week period. Small numbers by modern standards, to be sure, but perceived as a remarkable increase by contemporaries, demonstrating (according to the report on Paris tourists) that “the rage for travelling” had reached “an amazing pitch of folly.” Even as far east as Dresden and Vienna, not the most popular stops on a grand tourist’s itinerary, the British consuls, whose jobs included looking after visiting Britons, remarked on the inundation of tourists.

Throughout the eighteenth century, grand tourists were almost exclusively male and predominantly British, although there were some notable exceptions—among them Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, who accompanied her husband during his stint as ambassador to Constantinople from 1716 to 1718 and left him twenty years later to pursue a peripatetic life on the Continent; and Johann von Goethe, already famous in the mid-1780s as the author of The Sorrows of Young Werther, who slipped away from the court at Weimar to travel in Italy, seeking escape from his fame and the formalities of court life. The grand tour was largely a British invention, mainly
because Britain, as the wealthiest nation in the world, had a substantial upper class with enough money and leisure to travel. (Philip Thicknesse, who traveled extensively through France and Spain in the 1770s, remarked that those who believed the French had no interest in traveling were wrong; it was the cost of travel and government restrictions on leaving France that kept them home.) In addition, many educated Britons felt isolated from the rest of Europe and from the sources of Western history and culture. To become a fully educated member of elite society, they believed, one had to see the ruins of classical Rome as well as the churches and palaces and art collections of the great Continental capitals.

By the time Boswell set off on his travels, the grand tour had settled into a more or less fixed pattern. Although the first major guidebook to European travel, Thomas Nugent’s *Grand Tour* (first published in 1749), gave equal weight to France, Italy, Germany, and the Netherlands, devoting one thick volume to each country, in fact the grand tourists of the late eighteenth century confined themselves mainly to France and Italy, concentrating on a handful of cities: Paris, Geneva, Rome, Florence, Venice, and Naples, with brief stops in some of the smaller Italian cities. This had not always been the case; in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, the religious controversies of the Reformation made Italy a potentially dangerous place for British travelers, and young tourists typically spent most of their time in France, often devoting several weeks or months to language study in one of the Provincial towns before going to Paris. While the French capital remained an essential part of the grand tourist’s itinerary, Italy was its heart. For Western Europeans, Italy was the source of all that was important in their culture, both ancient and modern: home of the Romans, whose language formed the core of upper-class British education and whose government and art remained models for emulation, and of the great Renaissance artists, considered by the British to be the finest exemplars of modern aesthetic taste. As Boswell’s mentor, Samuel Johnson, put it, “A Man who has not been in Italy, is always conscious of an inferiority, from his not having seen what it is expected a man should see.”

By the time Boswell set off on his tour, Italy was gaining popularity for less exalted reasons as well. The Italians’ reputation as a
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gregarious and uninhibited people, the presumed easy availability of women, even the brilliant colors of the landscape and the warm climate exercised a powerful attraction for northern Europeans. Certainly the pleasures of the senses were always part of the grand tourists’ motives—at least if the cautionary literature warning of the temptations facing young travelers is any indication—but the traditional purpose of the grand tour was educational, focused on visiting historical and cultural sites and observing what were loosely known as the manners and customs of foreign nations. Toward the end of the eighteenth century, however, the sensual pleasures of the Mediterranean climate and culture were more readily acknowledged as one of the main reasons to visit Italy. When Boswell wrote, “I’m determined to try all experiments with a soul and body,” he had in mind the pleasures of the flesh more than the intellect."

Goethe, traveling two decades later, seeking escape from what seemed to him an unbearably rigid court society, claimed to feel the weight of responsibility and routine fall away as soon as he crossed the Alps. Unlike Boswell, he was attracted not to greater sexual license but to freedom from the notion of work as an end in itself. Italians, he remarked, worked “not merely to live but to enjoy themselves: they wish even their work to be a recreation.” He was not uncritical of the Italian approach to life—living for the moment left many cold and hungry in winter, he observed—but was profoundly influenced by his encounter with a radically different approach to everyday life. Both men were somewhat ahead of their time in acknowledging so clearly Italy’s appeal to the senses as well as the intellect, but by the early decades of the nineteenth century, the Mediterranean, and Italy in particular, would become a mecca for northern Europeans seeking respite from both cold winters and rigid social conventions."

ALTHOUGH GRAND TOURISTS had to contend with conditions that seem primitive by contemporary standards, by the late eighteenth century travel was actually quite well organized compared to what it had been a few decades earlier. Roads improved substantially in the second half of the century, regular coach and cross-Channel
ferry routes were established, and a few entrepreneurs began providing services designed specifically to aid the tourist. One could, for example, arrange for transportation across much of the Continent from either London or Paris. The few guidebooks available in the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries—weighty tomes like Nugent's *Grand Tour*, which was mainly a description of the European capitals, and essays offering moralistic advice to young travelers—were supplemented by a new genre of books written in the guise of travelers' accounts but devoting much of their attention to practical advice on itineraries and places to see.  

Even so, a Continental tour was not something to be undertaken lightly in the eighteenth century, nor was it for anyone on a schedule or a budget. Grand tourists had to be prepared to adjust itineraries and endure frequent delays, as well as cope with seemingly arcane bureaucratic regulations. The British traveler's ordeal began with the Channel crossing. Although, in theory, ferries sailed on regular schedules by the 1760s, rough seas or contrary winds could delay sailings for hours or even days. The crossing from Dover to Calais, the shortest route, took at least three hours and more commonly five or six; passages requiring double that time were not unknown. Travelers often found themselves sitting in port, waiting for rough weather to subside, or, once across the Channel, anchored offshore until conditions allowed their ship to enter harbor.

Once onshore, the traveler had to go through customs formalities and then arrange for transportation onward, as few wanted to stay more than a night or two, if that, in Calais, Boulogne, or Ostend, the main ports of entry to the Continent. Customs inspectors, in the opinion of British travelers who suffered their whims, could be maddeningly thorough in their search through every trunk, bag, and hatbox, and capricious in levying duty. Bribes were routine. Tobias Smollett, always quick to complain about being cheated while traveling, resigned himself to greasing the palms of customs officials. Taking a principled position is admirable, he remarked, "but requires a great share of resolution and self-denial." Luggage was subject to inspection again at the gates of every major city. To avoid long lines at Calais and further delays en route to Paris, travelers were advised to leave their bags in the care of a reliable innkeeper at the port,
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who would see to its inspection, deliver overnight bags to clients' rooms, and have all luggage not needed immediately sealed by customs agents, freeing it from further inspection along the road to Paris. Even this practice did not always work, however; Smollett was annoyed to discover that his books were seized at Calais and dispatched to Amiens, at his expense, to be examined for material "prejudicial" to France."

Clearing customs was just one example of the annoyingly complex bureaucratic regulation of travel, itself a product of the complexity of European politics. Of the frequently visited countries on the Continent, only France and the Netherlands were unified nations with centralized governments and legal systems. The German states included a bewildering array of principalities ranging in size and importance from Frederick the Great's Prussia to tiny fiefdoms barely larger than a good-sized country estate in England; Switzerland was a loosely knit federation of cantons and free cities; and "Italy" was an assortment of separate states and kingdoms, some independently controlled and others, at various times, under the jurisdiction of the Hapsburg Empire. Boundaries and alliances shifted frequently over the course of the eighteenth century as a result of wars and shifting political alliances, creating confusion about borders, customs, passports, currency, even measurement. A mile in Italy was not the same as a mile in England, nor was it consistent from one part of Italy to another.

Passports were not required to enter France in the eighteenth century, although experienced travelers and guidebook writers generally recommended obtaining one from the French consul in London as a precaution. In Italy, the situation varied among the numerous states and cities, and regulations changed frequently. Naples, for example, had a strict policy throughout most of the eighteenth century requiring visitors to obtain visas from the Neapolitan ambassador in Rome. As a precaution, British travelers were advised to carry two all-purpose passports, one signed by an Italian prince, ambassador, or cardinal, and the other by an English consul resident in Italy. One could, as an alternative, obtain a passport from the British secretary of state and have it stamped or "visé" by the appropriate foreign officials, but such documents were hard to come by, requiring a per-
sonal recommendation from a banker or high government official and payment of a substantial fee. Not until the second half of the nineteenth century was the British passport system routinized to the point where British documents largely replaced those issued by foreign governments for British travelers. Even then, passports were not required to enter and leave Britain, but simply to establish one's identity abroad. The modern system did not come into effect until World War I, when it was deemed necessary for security reasons.¹⁶

The multiplicity of currencies in circulation—perhaps the worst case was Switzerland, where each canton issued its own money—was mitigated somewhat by the widespread practice of accepting major forms of hard currency, especially the French louis d’or and the sequin (used in Rome, Florence, and Venice) throughout much of Europe. British coins were also accepted in a few large cities on the Continent. Even so, keeping track of different currencies and maintaining a supply of ready cash was no simple matter for the traveler. One popular eighteenth-century guidebook devoted several pages to tables of exchange rates and conversion of common measures. Most travelers carried letters of introduction from their bankers to foreign banks, requesting that they supply the traveler with money by drawing against his British account. It was not always easy to find bankers willing to accept bills, however, and commissions were generally high.¹⁷

Arranging transportation on the Continent was somewhat less complicated than getting across the Channel, although by no means free of frustrations. Transportation services were quite well developed throughout Europe, and major roads were good in France and the Netherlands, although less so in the German and Italian states. The traveler arriving in Ostend or Calais had three choices. He could purchase or hire a private carriage and horses, an expensive undertaking possible only for the very wealthy. More practically, he could rent a carriage—anything from a simple two-seat chaise to an elaborate coach—and travel "post," which meant hiring horses and driver at designated stations spaced along the main roads at intervals of six or seven miles. The posting system was well developed by the 1760s, with detailed rules about the number of horses and men required for different types of coaches and the intervals at which horses
had to be changed. Guidebooks listed every post station along the major intercity routes. These books, called *Livre de Post*, also included detailed maps, part of a series produced by French government engineers beginning around mid-century. Most posting stations doubled as inns, offering travelers the convenience of dining while waiting for fresh horses to be harnessed to their carriages. The system offered the comfort of private travel without the expense and responsibility of maintaining one's own coach and horses, although there were some disadvantages. Fresh horses were not always readily available; more than one traveler wrote of being told that all available horses were being kept in reserve for some prince or nobleman who was expected to pass through shortly. Travelers also complained of being overcharged and rudely treated. Even so, posting was the mode of choice for most well-to-do travelers.

The less wealthy, or those who preferred not to be encumbered by a carriage, could avail themselves of public transit, most commonly the *diligence*, a large, cumbersome conveyance that resembled three coaches hitched together with a platform across the top for luggage and additional passengers. The diligence, which could carry up to thirty people, traveled between major cities in France on regular, if slow, schedules; four or five miles an hour was about average. By the late eighteenth century, daily service was available between Calais and Paris, while coaches departed Paris five times a week for Lyons, and twice a week for Bordeaux. In the 1780s, it took three or four days to go from Calais to Paris (compared with two in a private carriage) and five from Paris to Lyons or Bordeaux. Traveling by diligence could be crowded and uncomfortable—springs weren't introduced until the late eighteenth century—and meant long days on the road, often starting before dawn, but fares were cheap and schedules reasonably reliable. Similar services existed outside France but usually employed smaller, humbler conveyances—in rural Switzerland and Germany, simple wagons with benches and crude coverings—and did not offer schedules as extended or as frequent as those in France. Boswell described the German equivalent, called a *postwagen*, as "a remain of barbarity of manners... just a large cart, mounted upon very high wheels, which jolt prodigiously."

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Many British grand tourists avoided the diligence because they disliked traveling at close quarters with strangers, especially foreign strangers. Arthur Young, a student of agricultural practices who traveled on the Continent in the 1780s, was appalled that his fellow passengers entertained themselves by singing for most of the trip, leading him to remark that he "would almost as soon have rode the journey blindfold on an ass." Smollett complained about the slow pace, the crowded conditions, and the necessity of eating French food; diligence passengers had no choice in where they ate meals or spent the night. ("I hate the French cookery, and abominable garlick, with which all the ragouts, in this part of the country, are highly seasoned," he remarked while staying in Lyons.) For the open-minded, however, the diligence offered a quick way to become acquainted with the natives, and those who could not afford posting had little choice.19

An even cheaper alternative was the vetturino system (voiturin in French). In Italy and Switzerland, where diligence service was limited, it was often the only alternative to posting. Vetturinos were self-appointed guides who contracted with travelers to provide transportation, lodging, and meals along a specified route for a single price. Traveling with a vetturino was even slower than traveling by diligence—six or seven days from Lyons to Turin instead of three and a half to four, for example—and unless one's party was large, it meant being thrown among strangers, as vetturinos typically put together groups of six to twelve. It also meant eating and sleeping wherever the vetturino chose, often spending twelve hours or more on the road; because the vetturino charged by the trip, rather than the day, it was in his best interests to get his passengers to their destinations in the shortest possible time. In northern Italy, Goethe complained that "travelling with vetturini is an exhausting affair; the only thing to be said for it is that one can always get out and walk." As the small, uncomfortable wagons often used by vetturinos made little better than three miles an hour, walking was indeed a reasonable alternative.20 On the positive side, the traveler had all his basic needs seen to for a single and generally inexpensive price, although guidebooks warned travelers to bargain with the vetturino. This mode of travel was common in Italy, where the language barrier...
provided an extra incentive. (Most British travelers spoke at least some French, but fewer understood Italian; and while French was a universal language among Europe’s upper classes, it was less widely spoken in Italy.) By the late eighteenth century, it was even possible to hire the services of a vetturino before leaving home, through an agent in London.\footnote{21}

Once past the formalities at Calais, most grand tourists headed straight for Paris. From the moment they arrived in the French capital, British visitors felt themselves in an utterly foreign world. Paris was smaller and more densely populated than London, its narrow streets clogged with “infinite Swarms of inhabitants and more Coaches than Men,” as Thomas Gray put it. Many buildings lacked latrines, and as a consequence residents habitually dumped the contents of chamber pots and other refuse into the streets below. Pedestrians had to keep their wits about them to avoid being run over by vehicles or dirtied by the mud and garbage that littered the streets. Horace Walpole expressed an extreme point of view when he called Paris “the ugliest beastliest town in the universe,” but most British visitors thought Paris a filthy, noisy, congested city. They might grant the magnificence of buildings like the palaces of the Louvre and the Tuileries, the cathedral of Notre Dame, or the church and hospital of the Invalides, and grand public spaces like the Luxembourg Gardens, the Champs Élysées, the Place Louis XV (now Place de la Concorde), Place des Victoires and Place Vendôme, but even then national pride encouraged unfavorable comparisons. Philip Thicknesse, for example, offered backhanded compliments to the Place des Victoires and the Luxembourg and Tuileries gardens, calling them “very fine” although not in the same league as the residential squares and gardens of London; while William Jones thought Notre Dame compared unfavorably with Westminster Abbey and the cathedral at Canterbury.\footnote{22}

Criticism of Paris could not be entirely attributed to British chauvinism, however, as French visitors also deplored the city’s filthy streets and cramped buildings—among them Voltaire, who wished for more open spaces, public markets, fountains, and grand monu-
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ments. He much preferred London (or more specifically, that part of London rebuilt after the great fire of 1665) to Paris. The only part of Paris that merited unqualified praise was the tree-lined promenade along the old ramparts of the city. Walking or riding along the boulevards on warm evenings, perhaps stopping at one of the many coffeehouses lining the route, was a popular pastime among Parisians, one that visitors to the city enjoyed as well.23

By the mid-1780s, when Paris was in the midst of a building boom, visitors found more to admire in the newly planned residential neighborhoods north of the boulevards and the neoclassical architecture of many new churches and other public buildings, among them the magnificent circular domed Halle aux Bles (grain market), the Church of Sainte Geneviève (now the Panthéon), and the Théâtre Français (now the Odéon). Construction of new bridges across the Seine and demolition of the houses that jammed both sides of old bridges like the Pont Neuf made navigating the central city easier. Most ambitious and impressive was the expansion of the Palais Royal (a former royal residence then owned by the king’s cousin, the Duc d’Orléans) into a vast rectangle of shops opening onto a covered promenade surrounding a public garden. Completed in 1784, the Palais Royal quickly became the most popular gathering place in Paris, where residents and visitors alike might shop, attend the theater, view a fine collection of paintings, have their portraits sketched, or take refreshments at the Café de Chartres (now the three-star restaurant Grand Véfour)—a favorite haunt of Thomas Jefferson’s during his years in Paris.24

Most grand tourists devoted several weeks to Paris. They might take up residence in one of several small hotels, although many preferred to rent furnished lodgings, which provided more space and privacy and were more economical for a long stay. These domestic arrangements, like nearly everything else in Paris, came in for a certain amount of criticism. Accustomed to carpeted, furniture-filled rooms, the British often found Parisian houses cold and cheerless with their large rooms, stone floors, and sparse furnishings. Most of the travelers missed their slabs of meat and simple, unadorned potatoes and vegetables—Smollett complained that the meat was “boiled or roasted to rags”—although some acknowledged that the
quality of the French meat and poultry was excellent and the variety in styles of cooking far surpassed what they had been used to at home. Arthur Young, who took quite the opposite position from Smollett on French food, thought French-style vegetables with sauces much superior to "our greens boiled in water," while Philip Thicknesse applauded the French custom of eating small quantities of meat and drinking nothing stronger than wine (and then only with dinner) as much healthier than English culinary practices. Even Smollett had to admit that French breakfasts of petits pains and pâtés of butter were "exquisite." 

Once suitably lodged, the British visitor's first task was acquiring a Parisian wardrobe. Despite deep ambivalence about French culture, British visitors conceded (implicitly, at least) Paris's place as the fashion capital of Europe, and, not wanting to appear conspicuous as foreigners, they took pains to dress in the French style. Preliminaries accomplished, visitors typically spent their days visiting churches and other public buildings, royal palaces, and homes of noblemen, paying particular attention to their art collections. In the eighteenth century, works of art were nearly all in private homes (apart from the paintings and sculpture that were an integral part of churches and other public buildings), although they were generally accessible to people with the appropriate credentials who requested permission to see them. In France, much more than in Britain, "the appearance of a gentleman, and particularly a stranger, is a ticket to go any where," as Thicknesse put it, even to the palace at Versailles, permanent residence of the royal family in the latter part of the eighteenth century. At Versailles, "the appearance of a gentleman" meant being well dressed and carrying a sword, but those lacking swords could rent them at the palace.

Many tourists did in fact make the journey to Versailles—which most criticized as overly formal and cold—both to see the art collections and gardens and to be presented to the king and queen. Approved visitors could wander freely through the public rooms of the palace, although etiquette specified that one could not approach the royal family and their attendants too closely. In Paris itself, the Louvre palace, although no longer occupied by the royal family, still housed much of the splendid royal art collection. Paris's significance
as an art center owed much, Gibbon thought, to the fact that the French nobility lived mainly in Paris, thereby concentrating the nation’s wealth in its urban homes, while the British upper class put more of its money and energy into its country estates. If all the art and architecture spread across England were concentrated in London, he argued, “we should be astonished at our own riches.”

The Parisians themselves were a target of endless, and mostly hostile, comment. The British thought them loud, boisterous, rude, lazy, indelicate, and interested only in pleasure. Smollett accused the French of “gay dissipation”; Samuel Johnson called them “a gross, ill-bred, untaught people.” (The feelings of contempt were mutual; Parisians often accused the British of rude and drunken behavior, especially at meals.) Gambling was a favorite social pastime, and young men were cautioned to be careful about being taken in by card sharps, who would befriend them only to cheat them out of their money, and by “artful women,” who would entice them into compromising situations.

French women drew the sharpest criticism from British travelers, who disapproved of their makeup, their powdered wigs, and their easy sociability, all of which made them seem little better than prostitutes to the more prudish of British visitors. Even the usually temperate Gray was a bit shocked to see that women’s faces were “dyed in Scarlet up to the Eyes.” British visitors, of course, had little access to everyday French life, and therefore came away with a skewed picture of French society. Although some had introductions to families that gained them invitations to social gatherings, most encountered the French people in the shops and streets or in formal situations like the presentations at Versailles. It became easy for the British, already negatively disposed to the French because of differences in politics and religion, to attribute obvious differences in appearance, dress, and manner to loose morals and a superficial attitude toward life.

Apart from Paris, France held few attractions for eighteenth-century travelers. Mary Wortley Montagu liked Dijon, although she thought it much too expensive, and Smollett spent several weeks in Nice, where he hoped to recover his health; but most grand tourists traveled in search of high culture, which meant focusing one’s atten-
tion on the major cities. Provincial France was seen mainly as ter-
ritory to be traversed en route from Paris to Italy. The usual route
passed through Burgundy and across the Alps, often with a stop in
Geneva. A longer and more difficult route followed the Rhone River
to the Mediterranean, where travelers had a choice between a badly
maintained, often steep and winding road along the coast and a sea
journey in an open boat from Marseilles or one of the other French
ports to Genoa or Livorno. Avoiding the Alps was the chief ad-
vantage of this route, along with the chance to see several fine examples
of Roman ruins in Provence—but at the cost of some very rough
traveling. Some tourists, Boswell included, skirted France altogether
in favor of a tour through the Netherlands and Germany. Although
gaining popularity in the eighteenth century, mainly because of close
ties with the British monarchy, the German states still had limited
appeal for travelers because they were considered backward and
primitive, centers neither of art and culture, like Italy, nor of courtly
manners and polite breeding, like France. Boswell spent most of his
time in Berlin and Potsdam, the two most important Prussian cities,
attending fashionable parties and angling (unsuccessfully) for an au-
dience with Frederick the Great.36

If the German states were seldom exciting, Geneva—a popular
stop en route to Italy—was downright dull, in Boswell’s estimation.
Switzerland was “a phlegmatic nation,” he complained (borrowing
the phrase from Joseph Addison, who had toured the Continent at
the beginning of the century). In Geneva, where the town gates closed
at 5:00 p.m., there were no fashionable courts and no glittering par-
ties, but merely a prosperous, respectable bourgeoisie, “exactly like
an English country town,” thought Mary Wortley Montagu.37

Geneva may have lacked excitement, but it interested British
tourists as the birthplace of Calvin. Even more important for those
of a literary or philosophical bent, both Voltaire and Rousseau lived
nearby. In an era when people with the right introductions could call
upon strangers at will, visiting these intellectual giants was part of
the itinerary of many Britons making the grand tour. Boswell, who
was even more enamored of famous men than most of his contem-
poraries, simply presented himself at Voltaire’s home one afternoon
during the usually acceptable calling hours. Although the great man
was ill and confined to bed, Boswell found plenty of other company there to entertain him, and in due course Voltaire himself joined the group. The next day Boswell wrote a charmingly ingratiating note to Voltaire's sister, who managed the household, asking to be permitted to spend the night on his next visit. The ploy succeeded perfectly, and he spent two nights under Voltaire's roof, arguing politics and religion well into the night.\footnote{33}

Rousseau, on the other hand, lived a reclusive life in Môtiers, a tiny village near Neuchâtel, with his housekeeper, Thérèse Levasseur. (She was in fact his mistress, though this fact was not generally known at this time.\footnote{34}) He seldom received visitors, although this did not deter Boswell, who was determined to add Rousseau to his list of conquests. Notwithstanding his letter of introduction from a man who had befriended Rousseau at a critical point in his life, Boswell decided to write his own letter, gambling that a direct, forthright approach might carry the day. "I am a Scots gentleman of ancient family," he opened. "Now you know my rank. I am twenty-four years old. Now you know my age. . . . I am travelling with a genuine desire to improve myself. I have come here in the hope of seeing you." He apologized for his French, acknowledged that Rousseau seldom received visitors, expressed sympathy for his frequent illnesses, and asked for an interview "as a man of singular merit" and as one who had been profoundly influenced by Rousseau's writings. The strategy worked. Rousseau replied that he couldn't resist meeting Boswell, even though he was ill and in no mood for visitors. Boswell dressed with as much care as if he were to be presented at court—scarlet coat and waistcoat trimmed with gold lace, buckskin breeches, a fur-trimmed green overcoat and lace-trimmed hat held under his arm to give an "air of being solid." Apparently he made a favorable impression, because Rousseau invited him to return three times and agreed to correspond with Boswell as he continued his tour through Italy.\footnote{35}

From Geneva, the Italy-bound traveler had to confront the Alps—for many, the most difficult and unpleasant part of the entire grand tour. The most common route took travelers south from Ge-
neva (or east from Lyons, for those who bypassed Geneva) to Cham-
béry in Savoy (now part of France), then southeast to the little hamlet
of Lanslebourg, where the carriage road ended. At that point, car-
riages had to be taken apart and hauled by pack animals twelve
miles over the Mont Cenis pass to Susa, just across the Italian border.
From Susa it was then a relatively easy thirty-mile journey to Turin.
The other major Alpine passes, including the Simplon, St. Gotthard,
and St. Bernard—all more familiar to twentieth-century travelers
than the Mont Cenis route—were less popular because they were
more difficult to reach from Lyons and Geneva, the usual jumping-
off points for a trip into Italy. None was accessible for wheeled ve-
hicles. The St. Gotthard pass, one guidebook remarked, "to a lover
of rude and picturesque nature, will be highly interesting," while the
Mont Cenis route was described as "nothing terrible . . . at least from
May to October." 35

Even so, crossing the pass was an ordeal for most travelers, who
had to be carried by porters in what Boswell called "the Alps ma-
chine"—a kind of litter suspended between two logs and carried by
four to eight men. Young and robust as he was, it did not occur to
him to walk the twelve-mile distance, nor did most of his contem-
poraries eschew the sedan chair in favor of hiking, although Gibbon
felt some guilt at the spectacle of men being employed as little more
than beasts of burden. The ascent from Lanslebourg to the top of
the pass (about six miles) generally took about four hours. Most trav-
elers paused at the top to visit a monastery; Boswell, who made his
crossing on a Sunday, stayed long enough to attend mass and dine
with the priest, "an immensely ignorant" man, in his estimation.
The descent into Italy, another six miles but even steeper, was fas-
ter—frighteningly fast, according to some travelers, who entertained
visions of pitching headlong into oblivion as their porters rushed
nimbly down the mountain trails. Gray wrote his mother that "the
men perfectly fly down with you, stepping from stone to stone with
incredible swiftness in places where none but they could go three
paces without falling." Some adventurous travelers going over the
pass back to Lanslebourg in winter went down on sledges. 36

Gray and a few others, among them Joseph Addison, enjoyed
their travels through the Alps. As Gray wrote to one of his friends,
he remained unimpressed with the works of art he had seen, "but those of Nature have astonished me beyond expression." Most eighteenth-century Europeans, however, found the mountains distasteful and even frightening. These negative feelings stemmed in part from the practical difficulties of travel in mountainous regions, which was almost always tedious and could at times be dangerous, but there were aesthetic reasons as well. Prevailing tastes valued order and symmetry and, above all, the visible manifestations of human creativity in taming nature and shaping civilization. It was no coincidence that travelers most interested in seeing the monuments of Roman civilization, the works of Renaissance painters, the courts of European capitals, or the salons of French intellectuals looked upon mountains as misshapen, chaotic heaps of rock. Men like Addison and Gray were ahead of their time in finding a wild sort of beauty and (in Gray's case, at least) evidence of God's creative hand at work in such panoramas.37

The alternative to enduring the Alpine crossing was even worse. Traveling down the Rhone from Lyons to Marseilles could be pleasant—most people went by boat—if boring. Once past the main ports of Marseilles and Toulon, however, the road along the Mediterranean coast was hardly better than a footpath, and the crude bridges spanning the rivers along the route were often washed out. According to Smollett, bridges over the Var River near Nice, which marked the border between France and the Kingdom of Sardinia, were regularly destroyed in disputes between the two jurisdictions. He had to pay guides to carry himself, his family, and their luggage across the river. In theory, it was easier to travel by sea, especially beyond Nice, where the road deteriorated and bandits still sometimes threatened travelers even as late as the 1760s; but the crude boats in common use on the Mediterranean coast, along with changeable weather conditions, made the sea route unpredictable at best. Typically one hired or took passage in a felucca, a shallow-bottomed, open boat equipped with both sails and oars. Large enough to take a small carriage on board, feluccas were nevertheless fairly primitive craft, with benches for seats and a simple awning over the stern as the only protection from wind and rain. They were versatile and easily maneuverable but unsafe in stormy seas, so travelers who chose to
travel by boat often made unscheduled stops in ports along the way. (The "normal" time required, according to Smollett, was something between fourteen hours and two and a half days.) He and his family completed the trip from Nice to Genoa in two days, stopping over-night at San Remo, where they put up at what was supposed to be the best inn on that stretch of the Italian coast. In fact, Smollett complained, they found small, dirty, overpriced rooms, bad food, and a single crude common room shared with "watermen and muleteers."  

He had little to complain about in comparison with other travelers' problems. Addison took the better part of a week to get from Marseilles to Genoa by boat. After sitting out two days in San Remo because of bad weather, he set off again only to be forced back to Monaco by contrary winds. Rough seas drove him ashore again the next day, at which point he gave up on boats and took the land route (much worse than the road over Mont Cenis, he concluded) the rest of the way. Boswell experienced a similarly tortuous journey when he decided to return to France via the coast route after his sojourn in Italy. (He should have known better, having read Addison's account of his travels.) On their first night out, Boswell's party stopped at Vado, a village about thirty miles north of Genoa. The next day was too stormy to sail. Boswell considered going on by land, but was told that it would take him four days to reach the French village of Antibes (a distance of about 120 miles), while it was only a day's trip under sail. After a day in port the felucca was able to leave Vado, but had to put ashore again after sailing only about five miles. Too impatient to wait out another delay, Boswell left his servant Jacob and the luggage in the boat and set off alone, on foot, to a village where he could hire a horse. Despite visions of robbers and murderers, he rode on until 1:00 A.M., when he roused the owners of a village inn to provide him a bed. The next morning he watched helplessly as his felucca sailed past the little port, unable to make its way ashore to pick him up. Boswell spent the next three and a half days traveling by horseback over rough tracks to Antibes, arriving two days after his servant and luggage—and demonstrating, in the process, why most people preferred to travel by sea, delays and all.
TURIN, the first stop for most travelers to Italy, was a pretty but dull city meriting only a brief visit for most travelers, although Boswell—entranced at finally reaching Italy—lingered there for a month. Armed with a letter of introduction to one of the city's fashionable ladies, he lost no time in seeking out the pleasures he expected Italy to offer. In Italy, he believed, one might be permitted to do as the Italians do, or at least as he thought they did, and that meant every woman who struck his fancy was fair game. Boswell was supported in this notion by the first Italian men he met, who assured him that he might have any woman he liked. "Manners here were so openly debauched," he concluded, "that adultery was carried on without the least disguise." Unfortunately for Boswell's intrigues (mostly in boxes at the opera), the women he encountered thought otherwise; three countesses spurned him in rapid succession, no doubt seeing through his overblown professions of passion and his haste to make a conquest. As an Italian sitting near Boswell at the opera one evening remarked, "A traveller expects to accomplish in ten days as much as another will do in a year."*4*

The "musts" for the grand tourist in Italy were Rome, Florence, Naples, and Venice, more or less in that order of priority. Most tourists visited a number of smaller cities along the way, but there was no standard itinerary through the Italian states. From Turin, there were two major routes south and east: to Genoa (the main port of entry for those arriving by sea) and then on to Florence and Rome, perhaps stopping in Pisa, Livorno, and Lucca en route; or east to Venice and then south, possibly with stops in Milan, Parma, Verona, Vicenza, Padua, Ferrara, and Bologna. Most took one route south and another homeward, varying the interim stops according to season and interest.*4*

Among the cities north of Florence, only Venice merited more than a few days from most travelers, who were both fascinated and repelled by this fabled seaport that seemed, by the late eighteenth century, to have decayed into a state of faded elegance. Once-magnificent buildings were run-down and dingy; every canal was an
open sewer, turning the city into a "stinkpot," as one visitor observed. Even Goethe, who could find beauty in the poorest of Italian villages, deplored the use of canals as garbage dumps and the "disgusting sludge" that accumulated in the squares and pathways on rainy days. Yet the city was full of life, with its diverse array of people drawn from all over Europe and the Mediterranean world. There were cultural attractions, in the opera, notable collections of paintings, and the studios of contemporary artists—Canaletto and his imitators were especially popular in the early and mid-eighteenth century—but those who liked Venice seemed to enjoy simply strolling about the city observing the people and the constantly changing life of the streets. John Moore remarked on the "mixed multitude of Jews, Turks, and Christians; lawyers, knaves, and pick-pockets; mountebanks, old women and physicians; women of quality with masks; strumpets barefaced; and in short, such a jumble of senators, citizens, gondoliers and people of every character and condition" who frequented the Piazza San Marco every night. William Beckford was delighted by the profusion of nationalities—Turks, Arabs, Orientals, Russians, Greeks, and Slavs—making the piazza, with its "confusion of languages," a veritable Tower of Babel. Besides its international population, attracted by Venice's commercial opportunities, the city's residents included thousands of courtesans, earning Venice a reputation as "the brothel of Europe."

Whether they traveled south from Venice or opted for the route to Genoa and then south along the coastal road, saving Venice for the journey home, travelers headed for Florence and Rome had to cross the Apennine Mountains at some point. Hardly a barrier of Alpine proportions, the Apennines could still be a formidable challenge. In general, roads in Italy were much poorer than in France, and the mountain routes, difficult at best, could become impassable in bad weather, forcing travelers out of their carriages to continue their journeys by mule or on foot. Adding to the discomfort, mountain villages offered primitive accommodations. The noted musician Charles Burney complained of a "wretched inn or pigsty, half stable and half cowhouse, with a fire but no chimney, surrounded by boors and muleteers, all in appearance cut-throat personages, with no kind of refreshment but cold veal and stinking eggs"—better, perhaps,
than the mustard and crows' gizzards offered to Beckford by two "hags" in a tiny village "suspended on the brow of a bleak mountain." 

After days of jolting over bad roads and substandard accommodations, travelers found Florence a welcome sight. With its lovely setting straddling the Arno River, it was one of the most popular of European cities, especially among the British. A sojourn of several weeks was not uncommon, and by the end of the eighteenth century, a substantial number of British expatriates were living permanently in Florence, forming the core of a British community that would flourish in the first half of the nineteenth century. Having been one of the most important centers of Renaissance culture, Florence was full of treasures for eighteenth-century tourists, who had been educated to admire Renaissance painting as the pinnacle of artistic achievement. As in Paris, art collections were all in private hands, the most important ones at the Uffizi and the Grand Duke's Pitti Palace. Evenings in Florence, as in other Italian cities, were often devoted to the opera, which was as much a center of social life as a place to listen to music. One British visitor, critical of the Florentines' custom of playing cards in their boxes during performances, was told that music added to the pleasure of a card party. It was far more difficult for visitors to gain entrée to local society than in Paris, a point that annoyed some—one was never invited to dinner in Florence, Arthur Young complained—but the city was so popular with tourists that they spent much of their time socializing with each other. When Boswell arrived in Florence, he found at least a dozen Englishmen acquainted with him either personally or by reputation.

By comparison with the journey to Florence, traveling on to Rome was a fairly simple matter, although Beckford complained of his slow pace over roads that seemed not to have been repaired "since the days of the Caesars." A brief stop in Siena was usually all that detained tourists en route to what was, for most, the single most important destination on the grand tour. At a time when education beyond the primary level invariably meant training in the classics, when every educated man was expected to know Latin and Greek, Rome was considered the source of all that was important in Western civilization. Those brought up in this classical tradition ap-
proached the city in a state of high anticipation. Beckford was not alone in straining for a sight of its monuments for miles before he could reasonably expect to see anything. When the city skyline finally came into view, at twilight, he thought it looked "still so wonderous classical" that he half expected fauns and satyrs to emerge from the fields alongside the road. For Goethe, viewing the monuments that had become so familiar to him from books and from the etchings hanging on the walls of his childhood home was deeply satisfying, because it allowed him to put together into a coherent whole those aspects of the classical tradition that he had understood only "in fragments and chaotically." Gibbon later claimed that a walk through the ruins of the Forum had inspired his great work, *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (published in six volumes between 1776 and 1788). Addison toured the city using Horace and Virgil as his guidebooks.45

To do justice to the classical Roman monuments required a month, Lady Mary Wortley Montagu thought, while a popular guidebook recommended six weeks as a minimum to see the ancient monuments along with Rome's more modern attractions, adding that one could easily spend a year there profitably. Rome's popularity among tourists had, by the early eighteenth century, spawned a small army of tour guides, both Italians and foreigners who had settled in Rome. The most famous among them was Johann Winckelmann, a Prussian who became Europe's leading authority on classical art and was named the Vatican's chief supervisor of antiquities in 1763.46

Boswell signed on with one of several British guides for a six-day "Course in Antiquities and Arts," which had the advantage of covering the major sights while still leaving him plenty of time for other pleasures. Goethe, on the other hand, felt only contempt for the "birds of passage," as he called those who raced through the wonders of Rome. One must study Rome slowly, he thought. "One is, so to speak, reborn and one's former ideas seem like a child's swaddling clothes. Here the most ordinary person becomes somebody, for his mind is enormously enlarged even if his character remains unchanged." Boswell may have lacked Goethe's patience, but he was not unmoved by Rome's monuments. Visiting the Forum called forth images of Cicero addressing his fellow Romans, while a subsequent
visit to Cicero’s house inspired him to speak Latin. He and his guide thereafter spoke only Latin to each other during their tour of ancient sites. Beckford, who thought even five years wouldn’t be enough to see all Rome had to offer, eschewed formal tours altogether in favor of wandering about the city "just as the spirit chuses." 

Modern Rome had its attractions too, of course. Like other Italian cities, Rome had important collections of Renaissance art (especially those owned by the Vatican) as well as a lively community of contemporary artists. Many grand tourists succumbed to the temptation to have their portraits painted, often on the site of some famous classical monument. A few made serious purchases of art, in Rome as well as in other cities on their tour; many private art collections in Britain were launched with paintings shipped home from grand tours. There were the more vulgar pleasures too, as the flood of tourists to Rome supported a substantial cadre of prostitutes. Having failed at bedding countesses, Boswell was a frequent customer, whimsically justifying his behavior: "I remembered the rakish deeds of Horace and the other amorous Roman poets, and I thought that one might well allow one’s self a little indulgence in a city where there are prostitutes licensed by the Cardinal Vicar." 

Apart from the classical monuments, the Vatican itself was Rome’s biggest tourist attraction. St. Peter’s Cathedral dominated the city skyline, and the Church owned one of the finest art collections in Europe; in addition to those treasures, the Church itself and its pervasive influence throughout Rome (and indeed all of Italy) inspired a great deal of curiosity and comment—much of it negative—from visitors. Attending mass at St. Peter’s was on everyone’s list of things to do, as was witnessing the ceremony of the veil, when young girls committed themselves to the life of the convent. Not surprisingly, the Protestant British saw in these ceremonies the specters of ignorance and coercion, at best influencing girls too young to know their minds and at worst forcing them against their wills into a stultifying life. Gray had the good fortune to be in Rome when a new pope was being chosen, a process he followed with great curiosity, while Boswell, always eager to meet famous men, managed to secure an audience with the pope. 

Most visitors drew a sharp contrast between modern and ancient
GRAND TOURS AND COOK'S TOURS

Rome. The signs of decay were not so palpable as in Venice, but modern Rome nevertheless seemed but a poor successor to the grandeur of the classical city. The Vatican, to be sure, boasted enormous wealth, but elsewhere the signs of poverty were overwhelming. Even the famous monuments were decaying from years of neglect, so much so that Gray and Walpole, visiting in 1740, thought Rome would hardly be worth seeing some years hence. "Between the ignorance and poverty of the present Romans, every thing is neglected and falling to decay," Walpole wrote; "the villas are entirely out of repair, and the palaces so ill kept, that half the pictures are spoiled by damp."

British visitors typically blamed Rome's decay on the Catholic Church, arguing that the Church absorbed too much of the country's wealth in its showy display and too many of its men and women in unproductive work at monasteries and convents. Strolling near the Colosseum, Beckford was seized with "a vehement desire...to break down and pulverize the whole circle of saints' nests and chapels, which disgrace the arena." The "lazy abbots" praying near the ancient ruins were "such as would have made a lion's mouth water; fatter I dare say, than any saint in the whole martyrology, and ten times more tantalizing...Heavens! thought I to myself, how times are changed! Could Vespasian have imagined his amphitheatre would have been thus inhabited?" With its frequent holy days and festivals (about 120 a year in the 1770s), the Church encouraged what foreign visitors believed to be the natural laziness of the Romans, thus contributing to the legions of beggars who wandered the streets and clustered around the entrances to every church and public building, badgering tourists with offers of unwanted services and demands for money.

If Rome seemed, at times, to be a city of beggars and ne'er-do-wells, Naples was even worse. Travelers commonly reported tens of thousands of unemployed, a problem they attributed to the immense wealth and influence of the Church hierarchy, as well as to a glut of unproductive lawyers, priests, and monks. Even so, Naples was a popular destination among grand tourists, one devoted almost exclusively to the pleasures of the senses. Apart from visits to the archaeological excavations at Herculaneum and Pompeii (begun in 1738
and 1755, respectively), most of those arriving in Naples after weeks of visiting galleries and Roman ruins dispensed with educational touring and simply enjoyed themselves. As Goethe put it, “In Rome I was glad to study: here I want only to live, forgetting myself and the world, and it is a strange experience for me to be in a society where everyone does nothing but enjoy himself.” He criticized travelers who accused the Neapolitans of laziness, pointing to many who appeared to be idle but really weren’t, like sailors lounging about the port while waiting for a fair wind. Northern Europeans, Goethe believed, had to work “feverishly” all the time to store up enough reserves for winter and bad weather; it was hard for them to understand the more relaxed attitude of southern Italians, where food was more easily grown and shelter could be more simply constructed. As a result, Italy had shoddier standards of craftsmanship; little manufac-
turing, and lower levels of achievement in art and culture than in the northern countries, but with compensating advantages: People could satisfy their needs with only modest exertion, leaving plenty of time to devote to pleasure."

Even the appearance of Naples suggested hedonism, with its brilliant displays of flowers and fruits and the brightly colored homes and clothing of the city’s residents. Northerners might think such bright colors “barbaric or in bad taste,” wrote Goethe, but in Naples they seemed entirely appropriate, “for nothing can outshine the brightness of the sun and its reflection in the sea. The most brilliant colour is softened by the strong light, and the green of trees and plants, the yellow, brown and red of the soil are dominant enough to absorb the more highly coloured flowers and dresses into the general harmony.” Goethe and many other visitors to Naples in the late eighteenth century enjoyed the hospitality of William Hamilton, the British ambassador there from 1764 to 1800. Hamilton became a near-legendary fixture in Naples, noted both for his gracious entertaining and for his beautiful wife, Emma, a blacksmith’s daughter forty years his junior, who later became famous in her own right as the mistress of Admiral Horatio Nelson. In Goethe’s eyes, Hamilton had fully absorbed the Italian ethos, giving himself up to the pursuit of pleasure with native abandon. “After many years of devotion to the arts and the study of nature,” he wrote, Hamilton “found the
acme of these delights in the person of an English girl of twenty with a beautiful face and a perfect figure. . . . In her, he has found all the antiquities, all the profiles of Sicilian coins, even the Apollo Belvedere . . . as a performance it's like nothing you ever saw before in your life.  

The seemingly carefree life of Naples was only the most obvious example of those qualities that made Italy so appealing to men like Goethe and Boswell. There were others, however, who saw only poverty, squalor, and laziness, made more egregious when juxtaposed against the physical remains of the wealth of the Roman Empire, Renaissance Florence, or sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Venice. These differing attitudes were partly a matter of temperament; a man like Smollett hated everything that wasn’t British, while others like Goethe, Boswell, and Gray displayed an immense curiosity about cultures different from their own. Smollett and others like him went through Italy complaining constantly about terrible roads, dirty inns, bad food, and the common practice of extorting high prices from travelers who had no choice but to pay, while others recorded such incidents but attached only minor importance to them. (“It was not for good eating or convenient bedchambers [that] we came to this country,” one traveler observed.) Smollett was older than most grand tourists, and obviously quite set in his ways, but there were plenty of much younger men, like Horace Walpole, who found little on their travels to unseat their sense of British superiority.

These different reactions also reflected the beginnings of a change in sensibility: Goethe was one of the early voices of romanticism, which would have a profound influence on popular attitudes and would, among many other things, contribute toward making Italy even more popular among travelers a generation or two later. Even Boswell, traveling almost a quarter century before Goethe, displayed something of this change in attitude. For nearly all eighteenth-century British travelers, however, regardless of temperament, Italy and the Italians evoked more positive reactions than France and the French. (Even Smollett’s complaints were mostly about conditions of travel, not people.) The difference can be attributed in part to travelers’ continuing fascination with Italy as the seat of the Roman Empire and so, in effect, as the cradle of Western civilization; but
YOUNG GENTLEMEN ON TOUR

perhaps more important for eighteenth-century travelers was the fact that Italy was a friendly state (or, more accurately, collection of states) while France was not. France was Britain’s great rival for world domination, and so, quite naturally, British travelers looked for evidence of its weakness. Italy, on the other hand, posed no threat, for it seemed obviously to be a land in decline. Italy’s greatness lay in the past, which was precisely its appeal for the eighteenth-century grand tourist.