The Exoticism of Italy in the British Travel Writer's Imagination, 1766-1810

by

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(Under the Direction of Steven C. Soper)

Abstract

The Grand Tour spawned much interest in Italian cicisbeism in Britain. The responses to cicisbeism have so far gone unexamined as a means to decode British opinion about Italy. This thesis takes four Grand Tour authors, Tobias Smollett, Samuel Sharp, Merry Berry, and Joseph Forsyth, and examines their treatment of cicisbeism with an eye to illuminating their opinions about Italy as a whole. The indignant descriptions of the practice represent deeper criticism of Italian society.

INDEX WORDS: Cicisbeism, Grand Tour, Travel, Sexuality, Travel Writing, Italy, Great Britain

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SECTION 1

INTRODUCTION

In the heyday of the Grand Tour, roughly a century between 1750-1850, British tourists were moved by their experience of Italy. Many were impressed by the remnants of antiquity or the achievements of the Renaissance. However, many more were horrified by what they saw, and even mostly positive accounts contained the same themes common in anti-Italian travel writing. The British traveller reeled at the grime of inns and in streets, grumbled at being accosted by great crowds of beggars, and stood aghast at a Catholic church that still retained real temporal authority and was fond of public spectacle.

Of all the themes common across a great host of memoirs and travel logs, however, few aroused such passion in the authors as the sexual immorality of the Italians. While many authors chose to pass by it in silence, and many chose to speak of it employing a host of rhetorical techniques that merely hinted at anything sexual, some of the best known authors of the tour were more direct. These diverse reactions suggest a broad cultural interest in the subject that crossed the lines dividing various tastes in the British reading public.

The most frequent personification of sexual immorality, and in many cases the main target of the attacks upon it, was the cicisbeo. A word with a variety of spellings and synonyms, the cicisbeo is not easily defined. At the root, it seems to be a married noblewoman's male escort (in the most neutral sense of the word), who is not her husband. Most frequently a married

woman or a widow would be attended by a cicisbeo, usually a man of noble extraction and always one she had selected herself, to a variety of public events such as the theater or opera, masses, and balls. These, however, are the connective threads of a wildly differentiated thematic trope, with each author having their own definition of the cicisbeo's place in society, as well as just how unchaste cicisbeism actually was. Typically, the more licentious the author believed the practice, the more vitriolic they were in condemning the practice and the society that made it permissible.

Why, then, did British authors of Grand Tour literature become so irate about the practice of cicisbeism specifically and the perceived sexual immorality of Italians more broadly? Rather than simple and limited screeds about the lack of chastity in Italy, these attacks were actually digs at wider Italian society. This connection is most apparent in the more anti-Catholic authors, who frequently invoke a common trope of the day that Catholics would send their daughters away to live in convents at an early age and only recalled them to the family when they reached a marriageable age. The theory of these authors, to be further examined in the later sections of this paper, was that Italian families shipped all of their daughters off to convents at an early age and only withdrew them when the family had contracted a marriage for them, which in turn left them ill-equipped to handle in a healthy way the company of men in particular or secular society in general. By portraying Italy as a land of corrupt and backwards Catholicism and sexual depravity, British travelers predisposed to dislike all things Continental could make Italy into an example of why Britain was superior.

This essay will be divided into three main sections, the third and largest will be divided into four subsections. The first section will be an introduction to the British representation of Italian filth, looking at the ways these authors express revulsion at travel throughout Italy in general terms. The second will be an examination British criticism of begging, which is frequently bound up with either discussions of filth, Catholic mismanagement, or both. This is important to describe how these upper crust travelers perceived Italian commoners, as well as a practical demonstration of a society gone wrong due to sheer overpopulation. The third section will deal with sexual practices as seen by the British authors, as well as their link with the each author's treatment of Catholicism. Each of our four main sources from the period will receive a dedicated subsection of this third part, examining each author's thoughts about cicisbeism, the church, and society.

I will follow four influential and representative authors. First there is Tobias Smollett, a Scottish author who was very well known in his day for his satires. Jonathan Sharp, a doctor by trade, wrote an account so scathing in 1766 that Giuseppe Baretti, a prominent member of the London Italian expatriate community, wrote an irate rebuke aimed mostly at him. Mary Berry, a teenager during her first tour of Italy, never published her account in her own lifetime but nevertheless remains one of the most influential female travelers within the historiography. Finally, Joseph Forsyth, author of an occasionally scattered account affected by his detention during the French Revolution, continues to be one of the most frequently cited sources on cicisbeism in the literature, with his definition and its connotations becoming quite widespread.

Comparing these authors, we can build an understanding of British reactions to Italy, the emotions they stirred, and the wider conclusions they drew from what they saw.

Pleasure and Guilt on the Grand Tour by Chloe Chard has presented one of the most interesting works on British accounts of the Grand Tour. Chard argues that authors of travel literature from the seventeenth century to the early nineteenth employed certain rhetorical strategies to either accentuate the otherness of the destination or in finding similarities that instead create normality. Both effects were designed to interest the reader and raise the book's profile. Such devices included hyperbole and an emphasis of excess, which are mainstays of the primary sources we will be examining in this paper. These rhetorical strategies, Chard goes on to say, create a generalized framework that allow modern readers to examine travel writing as a genre that creates people and places that are often only shadows of a real place, larger and more vaguely defined than the object casting the shadow and naturally inviting the mind to impose new ideas and meanings onto the form in order to make sense of it.

Another critical work that this paper builds on is Jeremy Black's *Italy and the Grand Tour*. Black considers the Grand Tour to be an important social institution in several regards. While it was generally instructive for those who went on the tour, with Italy providing much of the artistic and Classical instruction expected of young aristocrats, it also provided an outlet for youthful energy while their families at home could find something useful for them to do when they returned. Black pays special attention to the daily realities of the Tour in Italy, and relates the experiences and activities of a large number of travelers, drawn mainly from Britain. The

often raucous voyages Black paints a vivid description of the average British traveler in Italy, and the mindsets that were common before, during, and after an encounter with Italy.

On the subject of cicisbeism in particular, which this piece will mainly deal with, two important authors are especially worth noting. Roberto Bizzocchi's *A Lady's Man* is an attempt to understand just what cicisbeism actually was, how it was practiced, and what it meant to the people practicing it. In doing so, Bizzocchi traces the rise and fall of the practice as modern nationalism began to reshape how Italians thought about family life and eventually lead to the extinction of the practice. Silvana Patriarca in *Italian Vices*, on the other hand, focuses even more on non-Italian observations of cicisbeism and other perceived shortcomings in Italy, and their effect on the development of the idea of Italian nationhood. Patriarca shows the use of cicisbeism as a rhetorical device by non-Italians to show weakness in Italian character, and the effects that this dialogue outside the peninsula had on the birth of Italian nationalist thinking.

The work of these and other historians is of great value to my work and the general academic community. While they have made strides in their own fields, there has yet to be a history focused on the impact of cicisbeism on the British mind in the latter half of the eighteenth century and how it influenced discourse about Italy. This paper is meant to fill in this particular gap, and in doing so demonstrate a clearer picture of British responses to a practice they considered exotic enough to comment on at length and adopt the word directly into English.

SECTION 2

FILTH AND BEGGING IN ITALY

The British traveller was, by necessity, frequently obliged to deal with temporary lodgings in between major cities along the Tour. These were seldom to their satisfaction. Tobias Smollett is easily the most eloquent of our authors on filth. The arrival of many travelers at a roadside inn horrified them. Speaking of the inns between Rome and Terni, Smollett wrote, "The houses are 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."[1] Smollett hated the temporary accommodations he found, almost without exception, from the time he left England. Italian inns, however, were especially bad, and he frequently fumed in his *Travels* about how disgusting not only the inns but the Italians themselves were.

Fortunately, Smollett gives us an insight into what he considers the single most galling sort of filth. "...We retired to our repose: but I had not been in bed five minutes, when I felt something crawling on different parts of my body, and taking a light to examine, perceived above a dozen large bugs. You must know I have the same kind of antipathy to these vermin, that some

[1] Tobias Smollett, *Travels Through France and Italy*, (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1979), 293.

persons have to a cat or a breast of veal."[2] When encountering an inn that was literally lousy, Smollett could rant for pages. While he was somewhat happier in long term housing, such as he had in Nice or Rome, Smollett found dirt and bedbugs in the inns to be the primary material of Italy's construction and denigrated it accordingly. This theme of filth relating to national prominence is emphasized in the last lines of his book.

Smollett dated the last letter which comprises his *Travels* June 13, 1765. The letter waxes predictably poetic about Britain. "I am attached to my country, because it is the land of liberty, cleanliness, and convenience. . ."[3] This line is fairly representative of the whole letter, saying that Smollett has learned more reasons to love Britain and that his belief that it is superior to other European states is now reenforced by experience. Throughout his time in Italy Smollett berated Italians both for living in filth and for believing this was an acceptable state of affairs. He seldom spared comparisons between a good, clean Britain and a degenerate, disgusting Italy. Even authors more disposed to praise Italy felt the need to comment on the state of inns.

Mary Berry, on her first visit to Italy, was similarly repulsed by temporary accommodations outside Rome. "The walls were only white enough to make the dirt upon them more visible, the floors much worse paved than any stable I ever saw in England, and to the full as dirty, and the quilts that did not touch the edge any way."[4] Throughout the journal entry Berry employs much the same language as Smollett, even down to complaining of sleeping on a bed

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[2] Smollett, *Travels Through France and Italy*, 211.

[3] Smollett, *Travels Through France and Italy*, 341.

[4] Mary Berry, *Extracts of the Journals and Correspondence of Miss Berry* vol. 1. ed. Lady Theresa Lewis, (London, UK: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1865), 53.

"which would perhaps have turned our stomachs in England." Her descriptions differ from Smollett, however, because they do not come attached with an extension of these situations to the entirety of Italy. While Smollett believed that the grime of the inn was a natural extension of the entire culture's indifference to the unclean, Berry did not extend the repellent qualities of the inn to the rest of Italy. In fact, where Smollett saw rural Italy as a revolting but representative example of the whole, Mary Berry reveled in the rustic scenery.

Berry took in the sights as much as her predecessors, and actually expressed joy in the countryside of Italy. She frequently refers to "fairyland" landscapes[5] between the major cities and how moving it was to travel through them. These commentaries on the sights are frequently effusive and make up the bulk of the pages that deal with Italy. They show us that Berry is at odds with writers like Smollett. Berry approved of the attractions that many people set out on their Grand Tour for in the first place, but also found the landscapes themselves charming, even the smaller towns frequently had something to recommend them. Italy was for Berry not in a state of decline, but a wonderland of beautiful sights and enriching experiences.

The identification of Italy with filth, as opposed to acknowledging filth in Italy, is one of the sort of rhetorical tricks Chloe Chard might suggest were often deployed to evoke a particular reaction in travel writing about the Tour, be it derogatory in the case of Smollett or merely descriptive in the case of Berry. Smollett had a clear and persistent anti-Italian agenda, and so took the opportunity to link cleanliness with good and apply filth as broadly as possible in his descriptions of Italy. Berry, on the other hand, merely complained to her diary of the unfortunate

[5] Mary Berry, *Extracts of the Journals and Correspondence of Miss Berry* vol. 1. ed. Lady Theresa Lewis, 41.

accommodations they had one night, and promptly returned to describing breathtaking scenery. In many ways, the common topic of begging was used in the same way to telegraph what sort of feelings and ideas the author wanted to evoke about Italy.

Writers frequently described Italy as being awash with beggars. Whereas filth was mostly discussed in the countryside, beggars tended to be more of an urban issue. Both, however, were frequently described in similar if not explicitly related terms. Samuel Sharp, commenting on the poor of Naples, presented them as being more or less a part of filth in an urban setting.

> The Lazaroni, or Black-Guards, are such miserable wretches as are not to be seen in any other town in Europe; perhaps among the ashes of our glass-houses in London, you may find two or three beggars not unlike them; but here the number is said to be six thousand, not one of which ever lies in a bed, but upon bulks, benches, &*c*. in the open streets; and, what is scandalous, they are suffered to sun themselves, a great part of the day, under the palace walls, where they lie basking like dirty swine, and are a much more nauseous spectacle.[6]

These beggars were part of much of Sharp's commentary on Naples, and they featured in many descriptions of the city by other authors as well. Their existence shocked in most British travel writers, and were frequently used as examples of why the local state and religion did not function properly.

Joseph Forsyth also highlighted the perceived connection between filth and begging. He

[6] Samuel Sharp, *Letters from Italy*, 105.

took it further, however, suggesting that Neapolitan beggars in fact did not mind their lot and the conditions they lived in. “Here tatters are not misery, for the climate requires little covering; filth is not misery to them who are born to it; and a few fingerings of macaroni can wind up the rattling machine for the day.”[7] This quotation comes at the end of a longer section describing Neapolitan society, and how the different social orders enjoy good climate, lack of conscience, and many other benefits found only in the place Sharp describes as “a paradise inhabited by devils.” The exotic element of mass begging is underlined here, it is meant to signal a society that does not work. During his time in Venice Sharp also deplored the “swarms” of beggars there and linked mass begging with a dysfunctional society where work cannot guarantee survival because payment invariably is taken from the individual by forces like the church. The most powerful reason, in the minds of many British authors, was the church which condoned begging as a means of survival.

Sharp did not equivocate about what he considered the reason behind the large numbers of Italian beggars. “The trade of begging, in all catholic countries, will necessarily prosper, so long as that species of charity, which is bestowed on beggars, continues to be inculcated by their preachers and confessors, as the most perfect of all moral duties.”[8] Many British authors disposed to denigrate Catholicism were quick to point out this connection, and the Italian leg of their Tours were where most authors tended to become most inflamed on the connection, citing both the especially high numbers of beggars and the social power of the Catholic church.

[7] Joseph Forsyth, *Remarks on Antiquities, Arts, and Letters During an Excursion in Italy, in the Years 1802 and 1803*, (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2001), 225.

[8] Samuel Sharp, *Letters from Italy, Describing the Customs and Manners of that Country, in the Years 1765, and 1766*, Eighteenth Century Collections Online, University of Georgia Law Library. (Accessed August 30, 2019), 32.

The church as center of moral decay in Italy is a running theme which many authors found persuasive, and inspired them to describe their own personal theory of how and why Catholicism had ruined the peninsula. In particular, the church was intimately bound up in many observations of sexual mores in Italy, and each author's opinion of the church frequently aligned with how much they felt these mores deserved comment.

SECTION 3

SMOLLETT

Tobias Smollett, the first of our authors, was born in 1721 at Dunbartonshire near Glasgow. His literary talents manifested rather early, with his first novel published in 1748, when Smollett was just 27.[9] This novel, and many subsequent works, would be well received, and fiction would eventually overtake his medical practice as his primary source of income. However, it was his *Travels Through France and Italy* which is most relevant to our interests. In 1763 he and his wife departed for Italy, the trip lasting two years and the publication of *Travels* coming a year later in 1766. Plagued by illness for most of his life, Smollett took the trip as many of the time did at the suggestion of his doctor to remedy respiratory ailments. Smollett himself gave some recognition of this treatment's merits in his *Travels*. However, back home in Britain, he died in 1771, a well respected novelist.

Smollett immediately turned up his nose at the local clergy of Nice. "I think there are ten convents and three nunneries within and without the walls of nice; and among them all, I never could hear of one man who had made any tolerable advances in any kind of human learning."[10] We can see his disbelief that these monasteries contribute anything worthwhile to the local community, and infer his disapproval at the number in the area by his counting them.

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[9] James Lewis. *Tobias Smollett*. (London: Jonathan Cape, 2003), 9.

[10] Smollett, *Travels Through France and Italy*, 152.

From the start, then, Smollett showed a particular disapproval for the monastic life, and his comments regarding the clergy throughout the book more or less follow along these lines. In particular, Smollett asserted that the clergy was an active drain on the economy.

Smollett likewise took exception tho the practice of payment to monasteries in exchange for prayers to be said on behalf of one's soul after death. He claimed in particular to have spoken to a very poor man whose great grandmother signed a contract for a mass to be said forever on her behalf, the cost of which completely consumed the output of her descendants' much reduced estates while being inescapable because the church would be favored in court.[11] This "traffick," as he called it, impoverished not only the faithful but their descendants as well, and made Italy that much poorer. Even when Italians were not being immediately observed by the clergy, they were still restricted by church influence.

In his travels along the northwestern coast of Italy, a leg of the trip Smollett and his party took by a series of row boats that relayed them from one small port to the next, Smollett found that it was generally expected that any food brought aboard one of these gondolas by the passenger was to be shared by the crew. However, despite repeated attempts, Smollett failed to induce any of the crew to eat proscribed foods like beef or poultry on fasting days. "A murderer, adulterer, or s--m--te, will obtain easy absolution from the church, and even find favor with society; but a man who eats a pidgeon (sic) on a Saturday without express license, is avoided and abhorred, as a monster of reprobation."[12] Going beyond Smollett's usual references to the

[11] Smollett, *Travels Through France and Italy*, 172.

[12] Smollett, *Travels Through France and Italy*, 210.

superstitious nature of Catholicism, this incident Illuminates another of his key criticisms. The church's power pervaded everywhere, even out to sea, miles from the nearest church or monastery. To Smollett this was an intolerable situation, as it infringed upon he enlightened liberal thinking that he was so fond of. Even more disturbing, however, was the church's inability to curtail marital infidelity throughout society.

While brief, Smollett's descriptions of cicisbeism are some of the most frequently quoted descriptions of the practice, both in the historiography and even by other primary sources. "The husband and the cicisbeo live together as sworn brothers; and the wife and mistress embrace each other with marks of warmest affection."[13] From this we can infer that Smollett believed cicisbeism was a longstanding live-in arrangement. Immediately above in the same letter, Smollett also compared them to a fictional group of people in *Gulliver's Travels*, distancing them from what he considered realistic, serious society. He would go on to repeat this theme.

Indeed, Smollett was all too happy to suggest there was something indecent, even animalistic, in Italian society as a whole. Immediately after the above lines, we have a description of some of the places where the nobility of Italian-influenced Nice would relax in summer. "Just without one of our gates, you will find them seated in ditches on the highway side, serenaded with the croaking of frogs, and the bells and braying of mules and asses continually passing in a perpetual cloud of dust."[14] We see this treatment of Italians as animal or childlike frequently in Smollett'w work. Italians are depicted as irrational, quarrelsome, frivolous, and

[13] Smollett, *Travels Through France and Italy*, 155.

[14] Smollett, *Travels Through France and Italy*, 155.

greedy for money and pleasure. While these most clearly play out in his descriptions of Catholicism and cicisbeism, they appear in descriptions of clothing, meal preparation, performing arts, social gatherings, and more.

At the gates of Florence Smollett again felt the need to describe cicisbeism, this time giving us a system of what he believed were cicisbeism's reason and origins. "The Italians, having been accused of jealousy, were resolved to wipe off the reproach, and seeking to avoid it for the future, have run into the other extreme."[15] From there, he acknowledged a counter theory "generally supposed" which suggested that cicisbeism was originally an attempt to keep noble lines from dying out by encouraging more pregnancies. Either way, the current cicisbeo was almost inseparable from a woman, and no husband could object without severe ridicule by his peers. We see again the irrationality of these arrangements, such as ensuring the continuation of noble lines by making parentage more difficult to determine. Likewise, Smollett describes them as venal in ensuring these relationships continue. All of which, Smollett was sure, made the Italian a tragicomic figure who was hopeless in his attempts to advance his society in an enlightened, rational mode in keeping with British society.

[15] Smollett, *Travels Through France and Italy*, 230.

SECTION 4

SHARP

Samuel Sharp was baptized at London in June of 1709. He was apprenticed at an early age as a surgeon, studying with several masters before gaining a diploma from the Barber-Surgeon's Company in 1732 and becoming a surgeon at Guy's Hospital the following year.[16] His medical career held several notable accomplishments, but our interests lie in his 1765 trip to Italy with his family. The resulting *Letters from Italy* he published upon his return gained fame quickly, and precipitated a public literary war with Italian expatriate Giuseppe Baretti. The rest of his intellectual output seems mainly confined to medicine, and led to a comfortable retirement in Bath, where he died in 1778.

Sharp was mostly horrified by Italy, and he believed the Catholic church was at the heart of it. Their system of values, as Sharp saw them, flew in the face of both enlightened liberty and morality, both of which were needed if a country hoped to be considered civilized. "The trade of begging, in all catholic countries, will necessarily prosper, so long as that species of charity, which is bestowed on beggars, continues to be inculcated by their preachers and confessors, as the most perfect of all moral duties."[17] This begging stood in opposition to the sort of work that increases economic value in a country. The connection between poverty and faith is further strengthened by public spectacle.

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[16] John Kirkup. *Sharp, Samuel*. Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, (Accessed January 21, 2020).

[17] Samuel Sharp, *Letters from Italy, Describing the Customs and Manners of that Country, in the Years 1765, and 1766*, 32.

Sharp believed the church, or at least the Catholic church, was a fundamentally destructive force on society. “I am now in a country where the Sovereign is a Priest; at a time of the year too, when the priesthood displays all its pomp, not to call it arrogance; and, I assure you, it is a trial for the patience of reason. We very well know, from the history of the church, what tyrants they have been formerly, before the laity dared to assume the prerogatives of civil liberty. . .”[18] The clergy, then, are naturally predisposed to ostentatious despotism, which is not in keeping with the rational leadership Sharp believed was necessary for a properly ordered society. This Catholic despotism led clerical influence even into the homes of Italian families, where it wrought havoc that lead to an almost inevitable, to Sharp, slide into moral dissolution most clearly represented by the cicisbeo.

Sharp believed that cicisbeism was known but misunderstood back home. “Many people in England imagine the majority of Cicisbeos to be an innocent kind of dangling fribble; but they are utterly mistaken in their character; nor do I find it understood here that the Ladies live in greater purity with their Cicisbeos than with their husbands; and, generally speaking, with much less. . .”[19] Rather than making the cicisbeo seem exotic but comic and harmless, Sharp considered him a darker presence. The cicisbeo was a fundamental sickness in society which sapped moral virtue. That virtue was a key component of British superiority, and the thought of the cicisbeo being dismissed in Britain threatened the national moral fiber. This moral fiber, and the consequences of its decay, can be seen in Sharp’s depiction of Italian family life.

[18] Samuel Sharp, *Letters from Italy*, 197.

[19] Samuel Sharp, *Letters from Italy*, 73 .

To Sharp, Italian family life is broken by the church, hopelessly inferior to what he considers proper British family life.

How is it probable that husbands and wives should have esteem, much less love for each other, when they are always brought together without the least participation of their own; the fathers never consult the liking of the young people, but look forwards to the endowment of the next generation, which are comprised in two words, Fortune and Family. All that I have here said is so literally true, that it very seldom happens the parties know one another before the marriage articles are drawing up, and, perhaps, do not visit twice, before the day of consummation; she, to that moment, is locked up in a convent.[20]

Sharp contends that, at least among the ranks of the nobility, all marriages are completely arranged without any consideration of the interests of the young people getting married, and in fact the bride to be is not even present in society. This is because she has been kept at a convent, due to the the interference of the church in family life. This sets up young women to be improperly introduced to society in general, and men in particular.

Once the couple is married, Sharp assumes a rapid estrangement between the newlyweds. “In Italy, a certain knowledge of every wife’s attachment to a lover, extinguishes all social affection, and all fondness for the offspring; and it is only the eldest born, who the husband is sure belongs to him; and for that security, it is generally requisite, the birth should take place in

[20] Samuel Sharp, *Letters from Italy*, 75.

the first year, as the women seldom hold out longer without a cicisbeo. . .”[21] Sharp presented infidelity as the rule, rather than the exception, in Italian society. In fact, he contended elsewhere in the account that it was considered ridiculous by Italians for a woman not to have a cicisbeo. The confused parentage of Italian children and the lack of affection between married couples meant that the family was practically unsalvageable in the peninsula.

Without the affection that Sharp describes as being natural to British families, parents hold little affection for their children. “. . .with us, the joint interest of both father and mother in their little ones, with perhaps the blended features of their progeny, do not contribute in a small degree to heal any accidental breaches, or at least, to make them live seemingly on good terms for the sake of their posterity.”[22] Without this parental interest, Sharp suggests that giving daughters up to convents for their education and only considering their marriage in terms of strengthening the family fortune makes more sense. This creates a closed life cycle, with the convent preparing the next generation as insufficiently as it had the last, and the process repeats ad infinitum. This is the central point of pique that Sharp returns to time and again, the church creates the conditions for the cicisbeo and the cicisbeo for the church’s role in the family.

[21] Samuel Sharp, *Letters from Italy*, 78.

[22] Samuel Sharp, *Letters from Italy*, 78.

SECTION 5

BERRY

Mary Berry was born in March of 1763 in Yorkshire. In 1767 her mother died after giving birth, along with the new child, leaving Berry and her younger sister in the care of their father, who's "odd inherent easiness of his character,"[23] as Berry herself put it, meant that the children lived for years with their grandmother before taking up several residences in and around London. with their father. Money seems to have been a frequent source of anxiety, but not so much that it prevented a tour of the continent, and with it Italy, in 1783.[24] The family returned to London in the summer of 1785, where Berry lived with her father and younger sister until their respective deaths. She went on to have a respectable literary career, and another visit to the continent saw her trapped perilously on the continent at the same time as Forsyth before escaping from a Danish port back to Britain. She died in November of 1852.

Mary Berry, having arrived in Italy as a teenage girl, is alone among our major sources in that she does not report a swarm of cicisbeos rampaging through the peninsula. In fact, she only mentions any sort of extramarital affair twice in the first volume of her *Journal*.[25]

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[23] Mary Berry, *Extracts of the Journals and Correspondence of Miss Berry* vol. 1, 12.

[24] Charles Kent. *Berry, Mary*. Revised by Pat Rogers. Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, (Accessed January 24, 2020).

[25] Mary Berry, *Extracts of the Journals and Correspondence of Miss Berry* vol. 1, 49 & 121.

She seems to have had a far more positive opinion than our previous travelers. In Italy Berry found not degeneracy, but exhilaration. This is most readily visible in her more nuanced treatment of Catholicism.

Where her predecessors found Italy to be an amoral and decadent backwater, Berry found the peninsula to be a rapturous experience. The Catholic church did provoke some critical remarks, but was approached with more openness and censured with a narrower brush than we have by now come to expect. She is our only author to have personally met the sitting pope, whose office she treated with a satirical slant. "Here he chanted a part of the service in a very audible voice, one man, upon his knees, supporting the book before him; another, kneeling (though it is broad daylight), holding a large lighted taper; a third standing by to prompt him, in case *his infallibility* should go wrong; and a fourth to turn the leaves of the book, for he is allowed to do no one thing for himself."[26] It should be mentioned that she does not hold as much contempt for the man himself upon their personal meetings, but mainly seems to be reacting to the office and what she sees as ridiculous excesses of delicacy. While Berry in general finds the religious art of Italy more agreeable than Smollett or Sharp, she finds live clerical proceedings problematic.

While priestly extravagance impeded Italian society, the laity bothered her far more when demonstrating what she considered an uncommonly superstitious bent. In one of her passages of greatest pique Berry describes the Sacred Stairs in St. John Lateran and the traditional devotional practices thereon.

[26] Berry, *Extracts of the Journals and Correspondence of Miss Berry* vol. 1, 59

The Scala Santa, in a separate building near the church, with a chapel at the top, which no woman ever enters, and which is generally locked. We saw two poor men, one like a countryman, the other like a servant out of place, ascend the stairs with every mark of humiliation and great inward contrition and misery; they said a short prayer at every step, and kissed every place marked by a cross where they suppose the blood had fallen: but, to the disgrace of this enlightened age, or rather of the Roman Catholic religion, this ceremony is still performed by people who *ought*, by their education, to be above such fooleries or supposing them agreeable to the Creator. The Princess D. and her daughter (a young girl) were seen by the King of Sweden ascending these steps upon their knees, praying, kissing the cross, &c., their footman behind going through the same operation. It must be remembered, however, that the Princess D. is a notorious bigot, and for these some years past has been entirely governed by a mean and ignorant priest, who has made himself more master of the palace than the prince himself, and amassed a considerable fortune, and yet is such a perfect blackguard that he does not even make his appearance when there is company in the house.[27]

While clerical misconduct, as Berry sees it, is on display here, the bulk of her ire seems to be directed at the people going through the ritual of ascending the Sacred Stairs. Rather than frame Catholic devotion as being part of a systematic decadence as Sharp had done, or simply the result of near uniformly weak minds to be found in southern climates as Smollett claimed, Berry seems to class this more as an embarrassing throwback that Italian society has simply neglected to

[27] Mary Berry, *Extracts of the Journals and Correspondence of Miss Berry* vol. 1, 68.

throw off completely yet. On the other hand, the offending Princess D. was, in Berry's own words, a "notorious bigot," implying that she considers this kind of performance happily uncommon. While deserving of censure, Berry characterizes these faults as the actions of a minority of zealots.

While our two previous authors have been overwhelmingly repulsed by Italy, and Berry has had criticisms herself, Barry is in general far more friendly to Italy. Her anti-Catholic bias, limited to extreme expressions as it was, did not carry the same air of inevitable and inherent decline what her predecessors are known for. For example, while Smollett and Sharp show Italy drowning in convents forever, Barry exults in signs that the church might be loosing power while observing a papal procession. "All the Italians were remarking how little the crowd took notice of the Pope or demanded his benedictions: it would see a happy omen that he is going out of fashion even with the lowest orders of people."[28] Berry views the Catholic church itself with criticism, but far less stridently than Smollett and Sharp. Overall, she notes enjoying the company of people who happen to be Catholic over and over, practically ignores convents and monasteries, and in general voices some of the anti-Catholic theme of the day, but not obsessively. Berry thus introduces us to a new and remarkable object from our sources, a positive emotional reaction to Italy.

Berry took in the sights as much as her predecessors, and actually expressed joy in the art and countryside of Italy. She frequently refers to "fairyland" landscapes[29] or the beautiful

[28] Berry, *Extracts of the Journals and Correspondence of Miss Berry* vol. 1, 102.

[29] Berry, *Extracts of the Journals and Correspondence of Miss Berry* vol. 1, 41.

appearance of statuary by torchlight.[30] These commentaries on the sights are frequently effusive and make up the bulk of the pages that deal with Italy, the lives of modern people holding only secondary interest for her. Even so, these accounts show us that Berry is at odds with her predecessors, focussing on and approving of the attractions that many people set out on their Grand Tour for in the first place. Italy was for Berry not in a state of decline, but a wonderland of beautiful sights and enriching experiences.

While our other principal authors might have seen cicisbeos as a constant, overwhelming presence in Italian society, Berry makes almost no direct reference to them. We do, however, have hints at some social situations she found uncomfortable. Berry's first time in Florence, arriving in the late spring of 1784, was uneventful enough. There were plenty of galleries to comment on, filling most of the pages written about the city, and often in the company of one Miss Gore and/or her sister Lady Cowper with the occasional theater performance in the evenings.[31] All seems pleasant, nothing out of the ordinary. Yet Berry herself, when she looked back on her time in the city, remembered a sense of ill-ease.

At Florence was our first stop; and here for the first time I began to feel my situation, and how entirely dependent I was on my own resources for my conduct, respectability, and success. My father, with the odd inherent easiness of his character, had since my mother's death entirely abandoned the world and all his earthly acquaintance in it, entirely forgetting that on him now

[30] Berry, *Extracts of the Journals and Correspondence of Miss Berry* vol. 1, 114.

[31] Berry, *Extracts of the Journals and Correspondence of Miss Berry* vol. 1,120.

depended the success and the happiness of his two motherless daughters. I soon found that I had to lead those who ought to have led me; that I must be a protecting mother, instead of a gay companion, to my sister; and to my father a guide and monitor, instead of finding in him a tutor and protector. Strongly impressed as I was that honor, truth, and virtue were the only roads to happiness, and that the love and consideration of my fellow-creatures, and the society in which I was about to live depended entirely on my own conduct and exertions, the whole powers of my mind were devoted to doing always what I thought would be right and knew would be *safe* (original emphasis), without a consideration of what I knew would be agreeable, while I had at the same time the most lively sense of everything that was brilliant and distinguished, and the greatest desire to distinguish myself.[32]

What, then, can we make of this? It seems reasonable to suppose she saw something there that challenged her and her sense of honor, and that her father and sister had some part to play in this virtue-threatening milieu she had just entered.

When Berry returned to Florence in 1790, she experienced similar discomfort. Berry herself said almost nothing about Florence in the 1790 excursion besides mentioning a feeling of melancholy. However, included in the wider journal and correspondence is a letter from her father. This letter gives us an outline as to what Berry was experiencing. “Here, at first, we thought of establishing ourselves for good, but the mildness of the climate of Pisa, and my daughters not choosing to form any *liaison* (original italics) with some of our countrywomen who happen to be here at present, nor to give offense by shunning their company, made us

[32] Berry, *Extracts of the Journals and Correspondence of Miss Berry* vol. 1,12.

resolve to spend the three winter months there, and to return to Florence in March."[33] Whatever was going on here, it seems that there was some friction between Berry and other British women in Florence.

By contrast, Berry seems to have enjoyed the society of most Italians of high society that she met. At Naples she attended a ball thrown by the king and queen of the Two Sicilies. Card games and conversation seemed to be the main activities, in a space which Berry praised highly. Berry seemed to appreciate the queen in particular, whose social nature meant that she spent most of her time engaging some group of guests or another in conversation.[34] Much like her descriptions of landscapes and artwork, her entries regarding salons, balls and other social engagements bear a great number of similarities and tend to differ only in details of what Berry thought most worthy of praise. The guests she mentions, thought, range from Neapolitan princesses to the reigning king of Sweden, even occasionally mentioning that she and her family were the only English in attendance at certain functions. Whatever problems Berry had with some elements of society, it seems that her problem was certainly not with the Italian women she was often engaged with.

Berry's contribution to our examination of travel literature about Italy is especially important when we consider her position on Italy as coming from a woman. Given the similar backgrounds of the other three authors, it is significant that all three censured Italy in fairly harsh terms, especially with respect to the conduct of Italian women. However, Berry made no note of

[33] Berry, *Extracts of the Journals and Correspondence of Miss Berry* vol. 1, 246.

[34] Berry, *Extracts of the Journals and Correspondence of Miss Berry* vol. 1, 84.

cicisbeism in her diary while on tour, and only two references to extramarital affairs (one conducted by an English expatriate) in Italy at all. Joan Scott raises the value of examining political discourse through the lens of gender,[35] and here we see the practical application of this theory. Berry stood, at least in part, outside the power structure which our other authors believed was threatened by cicisbeism and Italian sexual mores in general, and her interests were not necessarily in keeping with theirs. Her failure to note any of the practices which so perturbed prominent male authors of the day calls into question not only how widespread they were, but also suggests that the pool of parties interested/offended by cicisbeism within British society was in fact narrower than Smollett et al. would have us believe.

[35] Joan Wallach Scott, *Gender and the Politics of History*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 46.

SECTION 6

FORSYTH

Joseph Forsyth was born in February of 1763 at Elgin, Scotland, the son of a comfortable merchant family. In 1779 he graduated from college at Aberdeen and became a school master at London for over a decade before returning to Elgin. When the Treaty of Amiens was signed in March 1802, Forsyth quickly arranged to make good on what seems to have been a longstanding desire to see Italy and left for the continent.[36] His 18 month journey around Italy was cut short by the War of the Third Coalition, which began the next year. Forsyth was arrested at Nîmes returning home, and remained in a series of French prisons until coalition forces entered Paris in 1814. During his imprisonment Forsyth wrote *Remarks on Antiquities* in an attempt to present himself to the Napoleonic government as a traveling scholar and refute the charges of espionage for which he had been imprisoned. Returning to Britain in poor health, he died in 1815.

Joseph Forsyth, like Smollett and Sharp some forty years prior, had problems with the Catholic church. While there were moments he was impressed by Rome during Holy Week, he found the series of processions and ceremonies on the whole to be overdone.[37] This is a good introduction to Forsyth's thinking on the church, because unlike his predecessors, Forsyth seemed to be no less dismissive of Catholic ritual, but like with Berry these excesses do not seem inherently inevitable. To be sure Forsyth describes more excesses than virtues, it seems fairly

[36] James Cooper. *Forsyth, Joseph*. Revised by Elizabeth Baigent. Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, (Accessed January 21, 2020).

[37] Joseph Forsyth, *Remarks on Antiquities, Arts, and Letters During an Excursion in Italy, in the Years 1802 and 1803*, 216.

clear that he took a somewhat dim view of Catholicism, but without the hard surety of Catholicism equals superstition that Smollett and Sharp presented. In fact, Forsyth was not above giving fairly high praise to the church.

In some ways Forsyth goes even farther than Berry, who never meant for her defenses of Catholics to be widely read at the time she wrote them. Forsyth was definitely writing a book for public consumption start to finish, and as such any line that breaks the mould is interesting. "The catholic religion is surely a friend, but an interested friend, to the fine arts. It rejects nothing that is old or beautiful. Had ancient Rome fallen into the power of gloomy presbyterians, we should now look in vain for the sacred parts of the ruins."[38] Especially within the wider context of the section, where Forsyth is talking about temples like of the roman Republic that have been preserved as churches, this is a surprising comparison to make. Forsyth is making the claim that people from the dominant religious tradition where he was born, he himself being Scottish, would likely be carried away by religious zeal and destroy these antiquities rather than repurpose and preserve them. While this sense of respect is easily strongest felt in this passage, and indeed we will see that Forsyth had in some ways less respect for Catholic people than Catholic objects, buildings, or institutions, it is important to keep in mind this contrast.

Forsyth found the clergy lacking, though not uniformly irredeemable. While the clergy in Rome were passably educated, by and large they were not altogether brilliant.[39] This opposes Sharp, who went out of his way to point out clerical ignorance. However, Forsyth also said that

[38]Joseph Forsyth, *Remarks on Antiquities, Arts, and Letters During an Excursion in Italy, in the Years 1802 and 1803*, 77.

[39] Joseph Forsyth, *Remarks on Antiquities, Arts, and Letters During an Excursion in Italy, in the Years 1802 and 1803*, 221.

private debauchery was a common trait among the local clerics, agreeing with Smollett's position that there was something altogether deficient in how monastic communities viewed right and wrong. Among these fairly well read and hypocritical priests, Forsyth allowed for the existence of an occasional abbot who was exceptional enough to rival a young protestant priest in Britain. While this is still a patronizing notion, the exceptional members of a certain subgroup in Italy only came up to be the average in Britain, it is still not as hateful as earlier authors and does not make Catholicism the clear reason for a priest's abundant ignorance. Forsyth's beliefs about Catholicism's effect on the laity, however, were another matter.

Forsyth sees a positive connection, albeit one that is hard to decipher for the modern reader. Immediately before the above description of Roman clerics, Forsyth wrote an extensive commentary on Roman women. "But alas! can modesty be expected in a state where celibacy sits enthroned, and fills every post of authority or instruction? must not the interest, the animal wants of the governors discourage fidelity in the sex? must not a government of priests, from necessity, form a nation of libertines?"[40] This is a passage fairly open to interpretation, especially as Forsyth declined to elaborate this theory that a government of priests would form a nation of libertines. A charitable reading might suggest he believed that the most honorable state of being is celibacy, which would be undesirable for most people, and as such those who don't enter the church rebel against church teachings. A less charitable explanation might be that, while Forsyth admired Catholic institutions, he disdained practicing Catholics and the Romans lived at the very epicenter or what he believed was a corrupt sect. I believe it is an amalgam of these two

[40] Joseph Forsyth, *Remarks on Antiquities, Arts, and Letters During an Excursion in Italy, in the Years 1802 and 1803*, 221.

explanations. Forsyth was not implacably prejudiced against Catholics but was ready to make sharp critiques, and was concerned that the church in Rome had too much power, but in other places clerical influence might have been acceptable. It should be noted that, rather than the cool praise or half praise we have seen for the religion so far, Forsyth is here beginning to become more agitated, a trend that continues. Whatever concern he might have had for the church on moral development, however, did not stop Forsyth from passing censure on Italian women.

Forsyth's thoughts on Italian women, like the church, are complicated and occasionally contradictory. Continuing his description of the ladies of Rome, Forsyth lamented what he considered the decay of female talent. "Women, thus born for seduction, excel in all the syren-accomplishments (sic), music, dancing, and sometimes poetry; but they have lost those severer graces and that literate character which once astonished Europe."[41] On one hand he recognizes the accomplishments of Italian women of the past, that they made important scientific and literary contributions to the world, yet the contemporary generation of Italian women seemed to lack the will, ability, or both to match their ancestors. On one level this seems to be in keeping with earlier digs at modern Italians as being altogether less than their predecessors. This seems a reasonable dimension, and when we view it with other comments he made we can add to it the impression that Forsyth advances of Italian women of the present age being vain and frivolous, which is connected to her social activities.

Conversazioni, the Italian version of the famed salon so common in the European Enlightenment, were an important social occasion that all four of our authors mention, at least in

[41] Joseph Forsyth, *Remarks on Antiquities, Arts, and Letters During an Excursion in Italy, in the Years 1802 and 1803*, 221.

passing, with Berry devoting the most ink to them and in generally favorable terms. Forsyth, however, chose to highlight the competitive aspects of their formation. He likened the home of every woman with her own conversazione to a temple, with her the goddess enshrined therein. Forsyth goes on to say that these women expected nightly attendance at these gatherings, and that they were furious with anyone who decided to attend someone else's meeting.[42] This in particular never comes up in Berry, who seemed to enjoy the conversazioni greatly and never records any sort of problem with her hostesses. The image of contemporary Italian women as tyrannical is an important aspect of Forsyth's descriptions, however, and will be born out in other parts of their lives. In fact, this characterization lead to the main distinction of how Forsyth talked about cicisbeos.

Forsyth arguably goes into more detail than any of our authors about who the cicisbeo was, his function in society, and of course, why he thought they are a menace. According to Forsyth, there were multiple kinds of affairs with different power dynamics, with cicisbeism being a noble preserve. "A woman of quality may intrigue with her own footman or confessor: but her husband and her cicisbeo must be noble."[43] Forsyth immediately paints a picture here of multiple affairs carried on by noblewomen being a common occurrence in Italy, with cicisbeism being almost equal to marriage in terms of a public institution that designates the status of the people involved. In fact, Forsyth asserts that, at least in Siena, marriage on the whole is on the decline.

[42] Joseph Forsyth, *Remarks on Antiquities, Arts, and Letters During an Excursion in Italy, in the Years 1802 and 1803*, 214.

[43] Joseph Forsyth, *Remarks on Antiquities, Arts, and Letters During an Excursion in Italy, in the Years 1802 and 1803*, 214.

Forsyth seemed fairly convinced that marriage itself was coming to an end among the nobility in Siena. The reason, however, is a peculiar custom. “All younger brothers are condemned to celibacy by custom as sacred as a vow.”[44] The reason for this supposed tradition Forsyth never gives. It is part of a longer section regarding marriage, wherein he further claimed that a couple of comparable social rank were denied permission to their parents because they liked each other too much. This is the other side of Forsyth, he often has either faint but noticeable praise for Italy or condemnation that is particularly vituperative and difficult to follow. What we do know is that this passage is representative of these sorts of claims, of which he will make more about relationships and cicisbeism.

[44] Joseph Forsyth, *Remarks on Antiquities, Arts, and Letters During an Excursion in Italy, in the Years 1802 and 1803*, 221.

SECTION 7

CONCLUSION

All four of these authors employ the sort of rhetorical tricks for evoking difference that Chard reveals. When dealing with Catholicism in Italy, they describe both public and private rituals in detail, taking pains to distance themselves and their native country from connection to these customs even if, as in the case with Berry, the work was never meant for private consumption and as such is largely free of exoticizing speech. This is even more true when the authors speak of cicisbeism, as they highlight the connection to Catholicism they are able to reenforce the exotic nature of both, adding salaciously sensual details to what would otherwise be another catalogue of sights, artifacts, and religious denunciations. That Berry does not join in with this drive to inject moral instruction and quite literally "sex up" her work reinforces this point, because she did not originally write with an audience in mind and therefore had no agenda to push. Smollett, Sharp, and Forsyth on the other hand, wrote with publication in mind from the start and sought to spice their works to appeal to as broad a market as possible.

This desire to grip the reader is why cicisbeism returns time and again in the British public imagining about Italy. Italy existed as a place where "normal" rules did not apply, where a strange Church demanded stranger rituals, where the natives existed in some state of civilization less advanced than Britain. The emotional outbursts when describing the most exotic elements, be they scatological, theological, or sexual, were not just expected of "proper" British gentlemen

and women in the presence of the improper, they were meant to further charge a passage. A modern student of Grand Tour literature could be forgiven for likening Italy of the late eighteenth/early nineteenth century to Thailand in the late twentieth/early twenty-first century. Though studded with beautiful temples of great antiquity, brimming with delicious food, and situated in a pleasantly warm climate, anyone announcing a trip to Thailand today will meet raised eyebrows and crude insinuations. Just as modern travel entertainment accentuates the bawdier aspects of Thailand under the guise of worldly erudition, so to did these spiritual forerunners over two centuries ago.

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