Goethe's Italian Years

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Abstract

The dramatic change in the texture and content of Goethe's writings during and after his Italian journey has tended to obscure the actual events of his sojourn.

In chronicling this period of his life, it becomes apparent that his classical epiphany was matched, if not balanced, by personal conflicts which shed some light on his literary output.

1 Background

In the summer of 1742, tired by a short illness upset by family disputes, Goethe decided to make a journey south to Italy, partly for the warmer climate and partly to escape the social confines of Weimar. The journey took the best part of a week, but the first days of September saw him settled in a hotel in the lakeside resort of Malcesine. Here he was able to relax for the first time in several years, and rather than start writing, he took up again his old hobby of sketching.

1.1 Misfortunes of being an artist

While drawing the old castle and fortifications in the village, he inadvertently raised the suspicions of the inhabitants, who assumed that the visiting German was a spy (Germany being at the time in a nominal state of war with Tuscany).