In 1869, the young Henry James embarked on his first independent tour of Europe. His pilgrimage took him to England, France, Switzerland, and Italy, where he followed in the footsteps of countless other Americans making a similar grand tour. His tour was not worry-free, and in some ways it was hardly independent, as his parents, writing frequently from Cambridge, put constant and considerable pressure on their son to economize. During his fifteen-month sojourn abroad, James spent £400 of his family’s money, roughly one-fifth of his father’s yearly income. Some of James’ letters home describe his health problems in order to explain why he was staying as long and spending as freely as he was, as if he needed to persuade his parents that they had not invested frivolously in his travels. In March 1870, while living in Malvern, England, James received word from his family that his beloved cousin Minny had died of tuberculosis, and in May of that same year he returned to Cambridge with his Aunt Kate, who had been traveling through Europe and met him in London to escort him home.

Although Walter Pater would not publish his famous book, *The Renaissance*, for another three years, we can imagine that James felt acutely the temporal anxieties of those who are forced to cram as many experiences as possible into one too-brief interval of time, particularly when traveling to foreign places where he knew he could only be a visitor. As Pater would write in 1873, quoting Victor Hugo,
“we are all under sentence of death but with a sort of indefinite reprieve—. . . we have an interval, and then our place knows us no more” (90). When James reflected on his doomed cousin, who had intended to visit Europe the following year, he may have thought of tourism and his own cherished visit to Europe as just an exaggerated form of the human condition itself. As he wrote the following month, while contemplating his imminent departure for home, leaving Europe was “a good deal like dying.”2

James’ experiences as a tourist—first in Europe and then, many years later, in the United States where he felt no more at home after long years of exile than he had ever felt on the continent—were deeply bound up with his musings on experience, and in visiting exotic places he was again aware of the temptations of ideological thought. In Henrietta Stackpole, a minor character from *The Portrait of a Lady*, he depicted the convenience of sharply drawn views, which bring with them the certainty of what one will find, see or feel. Henrietta’s “cherished desire had long been to come to Europe and write a series of letters to the *Interviewer* from the radical point of view—an enterprise the less difficult as she knew perfectly in advance what her opinions would be and to how many objections most European institutions lay open” (70). The popularity of the grand tour, and the proliferation of tourist literature in the nineteenth century, helped to establish this expectation of certainty on the part of both experienced and unseasoned tourists. As James Buzard notes in his fine account of European tourism, “Two main observations recur frequently” in the written accounts of nineteenth-century tourists: “first, that the Continental tour seemed to be surrounded and regulated by a variety of guiding texts; and second, that by writing one’s own travel record one had to work within the boundaries mapped out by those prior texts or somehow to stake out new territories within one’s own text” (156). Even James himself, on guard against ideological thought, acknowledged the impossibility of what Emerson had called “an original relation to the universe.”3 Writing of Venice in 1882—in an essay that would later become the first chapter of *Italian Hours* (1909)—James noted the “impudence” of “pretending to add anything” to the record of Venice. “Venice has been painted and described many thousands of times, and of all the cities of the world is the easiest to visit without going there” (7). And yet, unlike Henrietta Stackpole, James stopped short of predicting his response to the place he had already encountered in texts and printed images. If he thought that the objective facts of Venice were indisputable, that “there is as little mystery about the Grand Canal as about