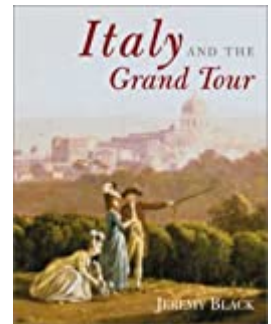


Jeremy Black. *Italy and the Grand Tour.* New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2003. xi + 255 pp. \$35.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-300-09977-5.



Jeremy Black. *France and the Grand Tour.* New York and Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003. 234 pp. \$65.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-1-4039-0690-8.



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For Armchair Travelers

Since Gregory the Great identified *angli* with *angeli* the English have traveled to Italy. Until the Renaissance, the motive was usually pilgrimage, ecclesiastical business, diplomacy, or commerce; but with the recovery of antiquity, increasing numbers of young men sought the monuments of ancient Rome or a humanist education at an Italian university, especially Padua. Complicated, but not suppressed by the events of the Reformation and the attendant difficulties of civil war and jacobitism, this unbroken intercourse between nations has been shown in ever greater detail in recent scholarship to have pro-

duced profound results for English culture. However, the most popular period of travel to Italy before the invention of the packaged railroad “Cook’s” tours of the mid-nineteenth century has been the Grand Tour of the eighteenth. This, the age of Palladian houses, Italian gardens, and collections of pictures and antiquities, is often seen as the culmination of the elite, aristocratic fondness for classicism. The Grand Tour was seen as part of the finishing of a young gentleman’s—and occasionally a lady’s—education. Witnessing the survivals of antiquity and the contemporary culture of the peninsula provided a patina

of culture believed to offer an advantage in society. Of course, the reality of the experience abroad was often very different indeed.

Jeremy Black's comprehensive study of the Grand Tour is a perfect place to begin. The book is designed for a general rather than a specialist audience and is unusual inasmuch as it uses letters and first person accounts—many still in manuscript—rather than printed sources and guides. He is quite right to note that observations and memoirs put in print often served purposes other than establishing an accurate record of travel abroad: these texts belong more to travel literature or that celebrated category of fiction known as autobiography. Because of Black's scrupulous search of extant material in unpublished collections, his account of the Grand Tour has a freshness and immediacy often lacking in more purely academic studies. His chapters reflect the range of experience available to travelers and include: the problems of travel itself in the eighteenth century, such as bad roads, weather, food and inns, robbery, and illness. There were the temptations and delights of sex and gambling; and there were the attractions of good company, foreign adventure, art, and ceremony; and always the ambiguous specter of Roman Catholicism which was seen as a threat to the souls of innocent young Englishmen but still mysteriously enticing.

Most of the travelers were quite young men chaperoned by an older, often clerical or academic "bearleader," whose responsibility it was to keep his charge out of mischief and firmly on the road to improvement. The reality of this situation was invariably different, of course, with the bearleader having little control whatsoever over the actions and practices of their young companions. The bearleader was dependent on his charge for present employment and future expectations; there was the difference in social class which made even the most upright of clergy unable to make too many demands; there was the uncertain response of the boy's family at home, as few parents wanted news of their children's repeated debauchery or irresponsibility. Consequently, the travelers often did what they wanted, and many actually did want to benefit from the opportunity to travel; others did not. There was equally a sense that elite young men needed to sow wild oats, and it was socially more permissible—and safer—to do so in Italy. Part of this resulted from the widespread belief that Italians were more open to such activity; but it also followed that the boy might actually learn something useful while engaging in refined sin among the ruins of antiquity and foreign courts. The fathers of grand tourists paid a great deal to send their sons

abroad, so their motives were often mixed, and not very dissimilar to those of modern parents sending children to expensive and distant residential universities. One hopes for the best.

There were other categories of travelers, besides the young men with their servants and bearleaders, especially after mid-century. Many older men and women traveled for their health, hoping that the sun and warmth of Italy might compensate for the rigors of the English climate. And, Italy functioned very much as did Paris as a place to escape marital discord or consummate arranged liaisons. As a destination to avoid an uncongenial spouse without too much social opprobrium, Italy offered many compensations, and an unquestioned excuse; as a place to rendezvous with an *inamorato/a*, it had the lure of both romance and distance. Women in particular could enjoy a level of independence and autonomy impossible at home. Therefore, the reasons for travel must be recognized as extremely complex and the effects conditioned by these motives. It was regularly—and rightly—observed that Italy could offer whatever one wanted or needed. The results were often disappointing, but the hope remained.

Black's *Italy* is a useful discussion of the experience of the Grand Tour from the perspective of those who actually undertook the journey. This is its greatest strength; however, the often contradictory evidence might have been more fully glossed to provide some measure of contextual consistency. The illustrations are particularly well chosen to enliven these first person accounts, and the notes and bibliography are a fine resource. The book is handsome, although the usual errors that result from lack of capable copyediting marred it to some extent, including the partial reprinting of the same page, at least in the review copy, on two pages (pp. 88-89). But, these are minor annoyances only. As a general introduction to the phenomenon of the Grand Tour in the eighteenth century, *Italy and the Grand Tour* is a perfect place to start.

France and the Grand Tour is clearly the companion volume. Indeed, it is manifestly the result of having discovered substantial amounts of evidence regarding English travelers to France in the eighteenth century while researching the book on Italy. It parallels it in every way: the chapter headings are essentially the same, many of the same travelers appear and some of the observations have powerful memories of those made about Italy. This, of course, does not detract from the value of the work, although reading the two simultaneously does engender a recurring sense of *deja lu*.

Black does indicate that France was in many ways a more accessible place than Italy. In the first place, it was closer and some of the complications of travel were mitigated, although by no means completely avoided. Family connections and a wider familiarity with the language made the kingdom more comfortable; and the roads were on the whole better and travel made more commodious through the regular *diligences* connecting some major cities. Equally, though, there were additional problems: England was often at war with France during the century and the traditional little England xenophobia even more pronounced against the French, given the lengthy history of hostility between the two nations. Then, there were the constants, defined by Roman Catholicism, which the English were religiously taught to despise from birth; the availability of pleasures and sin, particularly in Paris; and the fact that the French, like the Italians, refused to behave like English gentlemen and ladies. Consequently, the dictum of “suffer not thy sons to cross the Alps” could be said to apply with equal purpose to the Channel.

Again as with Italy, Black notes a change about mid-century in the demographics and hence the intention of travelers. In the first part of the eighteenth century, many of the travelers were wealthy and well born young men sent with bearleaders to expand their education and experience on the continent; after about 1750 there were more older travelers, including women, either alone or *en famille*. Their motives for travel often differed from their younger compatriots and they had more flexibility in what they saw and did, as even the most disengaged bearleader exercised some measure of restraint on his charges. Also, the rank and in many cases distinction of the older travelers gave them deeper access to fashionable society as well as the political and intellectual leaders of France. Their experience was, then, often of a more sophisticated nature than those traveling merely to compensate for a lack of formal study or to sow wild oats far away from the dangers of scandal and consequence.

Unlike *Italy and the Grand Tour*, the French version suffers from an absence of illustrations. For readers not familiar with the buildings, art objects, places, and people recorded, there is a great deal left to the imagination, which some visual evidence would have greatly assisted. Also, in Black’s attempt either to produce a parallel text with as little deviation as possible from the Italian tour volume or to cobble together another book from what was left after his earlier research, some important opportunities were missed. The cultural and intellectual relations between France and England were very much different from those with Italy, separated from the lure of the classical world, so evident in the Italian grand tourist, and in the knowledge the two peoples had of one another. England was very much a privileged place in the French intellectual geography from the beginnings of the Enlightenment. Voltaire’s residence there and his praise of the English constitution and relative freedom created a link that many English and French gentlemen cultivated. Equally, the attraction of rationalist thought helped form progressive English opinions in the century before the revolution. The English might have detested Roman Catholicism and an obscurantist Church, but so did Voltaire and Diderot, among many others. In short, Black’s decision to let the travelers speak for themselves using their first hand journals and letters, while avoiding more formal or printed work does not serve him as well in this instance. Some analysis of how these personal attitudes and observations revealed a deeper current of English experience would have made this a less popular and more useful book of cultural history.

Nevertheless, as introductions to the phenomenon of the grand tour, Black’s two books are both engaging and good, with the Italian version the most attractive because of its illustrations. They were not designed for specialist scholars but for the general, educated reader: they are well researched, well written and accessible, and hence models of their genre.

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