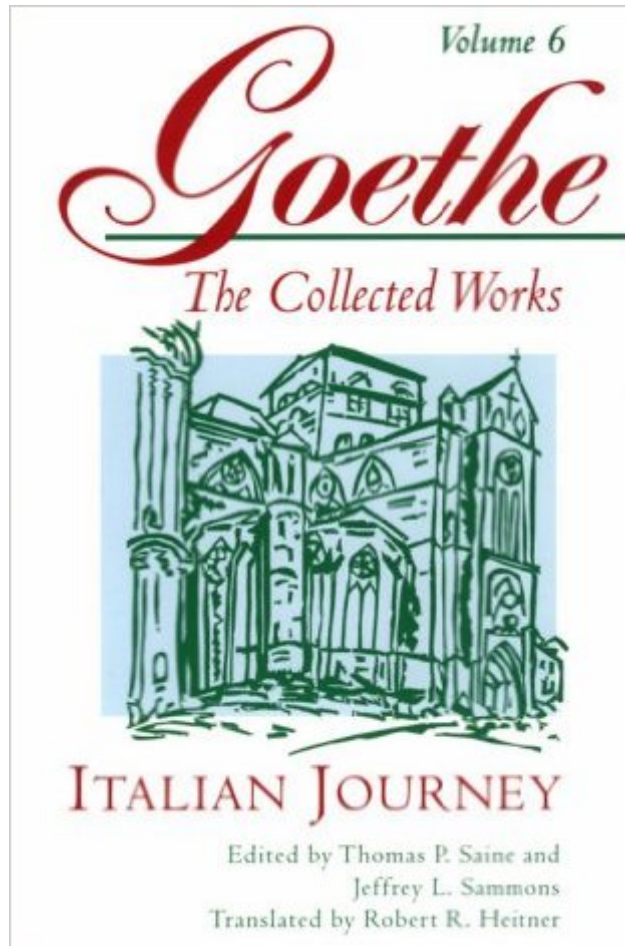


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Italian Journey (Goethe: The Collected Works, Vol. 6) (v. 6)



Synopsis

Containing the letters and diaries that Goethe wrote during his journey to Italy at age thirty-seven, Italian Journey reveals his tremendous range of interests. His writings cover literature, art history and his own struggle to be a painter, various sciences and political events, personal encounters, and the Italian landscape. "In Rome," Goethe wrote, "I first found myself, for the first time I achieved inner harmony...." For Goethe the writer, this temporal and spiritual journey was at the root of his development from Sturm und Drang to classicism, a decisive point in his life and the history of German literature.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

In preparation for a trip to Italy, I began reading the accounts of famous travellers to that land: D.H. Lawrence, Charles Dickens, Tobias Smollett, and now Johann Wolfgang von Goethe. I had no great expectations but was knocked for a loop from page one. Never before had I encountered a questing mind quite like Goethe's. Almost from the moment I left Carlsbad in September 1786, he was noticing the geological structures underlying the land and the flora and fauna above it. He sits down and talks with ordinary people without an attitude -- and this after he had turned the heads of half of Europe with his SORROWS OF YOUNG WERTHER. Here he was journeying incognito, apparently knowing the language well enough to communicate with peasants, prelates, and nobility. One who abhors marking books I intend to keep, I found myself underlining frequently. "In this place," he writes from Rome, "whoever looks seriously about him and has eyes to see is bound to become a

stronger character." In fact, Goethe spent over a year in Rome learning art, music, science, and even sufferings the pangs of love with a young woman from Milan. Bracketing his stay in Rome is a longish journey to Naples and Sicily, where he becomes acquainted with Sir Warren Hamilton and his consort Emma, the fascinating Princess Ravaschieri di Satriano, and other German travelers. One of them, Wilhelm Tischbein, painted a wonderful portrait of Goethe the traveller shown on the cover of the Penguin edition. The translation of W.H. Auden and Elizabeth Mayer is truly wonderful. My only negative comments are toward the Penguin editors who, out of some pennywise foolishness, have omitted translating the frequent Latin, Greek, and French quotes.

It is curious that, as translators W.H. Auden and Elizabeth Mayer point out in the Introduction, outside Germany, Goethe remains highly respected yet never actually read by most literary people. Studying literature during and before my undergraduate years, I was introduced to Dante in translation, to Moliere and Racine in the original French and, of course, to Shakespeare. But Goethe was barely mentioned, certainly not studied. Perhaps it is down to the difficulty of the German language. I simply don't know. I did read *The Sorrows of Young Werther* on my own in my youth, but remember being unimpressed. The Germans, on the other hand, have had a love affair with Shakespeare that, at times, has almost eclipsed the devotion to him in his own country. In short, I felt obliged to read this travelogue in an attempt to become better acquainted with a writer whom Germans hold in such high esteem. And what a treat it is! Whatever Goethe's motives in making a sojourn in Italy, much debated in the Introduction, it seems certainly well worth it for him as well as for the reader. Well-nigh every chapter is drenched with the Italian sunshine and *carpe diem* attitudes he finds in Italy (particularly Naples) which he seldom fails to contrast with what he refers to as the dark and gloomy northern climes. As he states, almost shouts, one wants to say, in a letter written from San Luca, "I shall leave everything as it stands because first impressions, even if they are not always correct, are valuable and precious to us. Oh, if only I could send my distant friends a breath of the more carefree existence here!

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