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"Classic Ground": Britain, Italy, and the Grand Tour

John Wilton-Ely

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Over the past decade the complex and fruitful interchanges between Britain and Italy by means of the Grand Tour have undergone major reassessments, signalled by exhibitions in London, Philadelphia, and Rome, and by an exceptional number of publications. The significance of these reassessments is largely due to the expansion of interdisciplinary studies, as has been promoted by this journal, where tunnel-vision specialization has been replaced by a recognition of the shared cultural values and interaction between the visual and performing arts, literature, and politics. Moreover, the study of images and symbols reflecting intellectual and moral forces, pioneered in Renaissance studies, as well as a greater attention to sociological factors, has also helped break down conventional boundaries of study. The traditional view of the Grand Tour as confined to the narrow world of a political male elite has been replaced by a new awareness of the far-reaching influences of this cultural institution throughout western society, as well as of the complex and varied social backgrounds of all those involved. At the heart of this exceptional phenomenon is the protean nature of the classical tradition, derived from Greek and Roman Antiquity, and transmitted from the Renaissance, through the age of the Enlightenment to the world of Romanticism. Although the dramatic archaeological discoveries of the ancient...

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