

# The Grand Tour

*"A restless spirit urged him to embark  
& meet lone death in the drear ocean's waste."*

*Alastor*  
1815

*Being An Account of the Poet's Travels Around Europe, 1998*

## Invocation

*O muse! Arise from slumber, forsake sleep,  
Awake on the winds with the wings of song,  
Sing blissful waves which lap as they weep  
'Gainst a cluster of embraces, graceful song,  
An eternal island among the vasty deep  
Imperial sea of the English tongue –  
Come fly, bring Apollo's crown girdl'd with leaf,  
Unshielded mine eyes, this sword I unsheath.*

## Part 1 Europe

March is spent & my bloody rent is due,  
Two life-options lying open to me;  
Break with a lover, lose friendship, split thro'

Or chain myself to the servility  
Of capitalism - a poet true  
I yearn to be, so young, so sure, so free;  
Romancing my mind with poesy's sweet flow,  
So trust us, with lusty heart, I must go.

I made love to my love the night before  
Wrapping my guitar in a grey, baggy,  
Jumper I wore on cold nights down Turf Moor,  
Raiding the bank for all my rent money  
& embark'd upon my third busker's tour -  
Her scent more mull'd wine, her tongue young honey,  
How she laughs as we revel in love's truth,  
I shed a silent tear for my dear Ruth.

I watch the white cliffs recede to a speck  
Singing fondest farewell to old Blighty,  
Then peer over the side, craning my neck  
& a certain dizziness doth smite me.  
I have to head down to the under-deck,  
Feeling so sick I think I will whitey -  
As one voyage ends, another embarks  
At Ostend - I change Pounds to Francs & Marks.

Thro Belgium's monotonous flat fields green  
With mental-moustache-men I share the train,  
Where some Flemish floozies, barely fifteen,  
Are singing the Spice girls, no not again!  
We pass thru Bruges, whose spires of golden sheen  
Glisten in the early morning time rain,  
Like beads of sweat on a wrestler's muscles -  
Half-an-hour later we land in Brussels.

I jump train South to Waterloo Station  
To be filled with war-pride at the great sight  
Of the Iron Lion of our nation

Pois'd above the field of terrible fight,  
I walk with the ghosts of Napoleon,  
Then return back to Brussels for the night;  
See Catatonia play, blitzed on grass -  
Boy oh boy that chicks got a real nice ass.

Up the long valley of the Rhine I go,  
Many gothic citadels mark my way,  
I watch the river's wide and ancient flow  
Then sun sets so I watch the stars at play.  
Into old Nuremburg the train does slow  
I've nearly crossed the Reich in but one day.  
I find the Frankenhoff, cheapest in town,  
Cook up a big fat joint & look around.

I view the building where the Nazis heard  
Their too kind fate - those monsters like Herr Hess  
Who'd murder at an evil tyrants word  
& left the whole world wide in such a mess.  
I sample German beer - glass size absurd,  
Then find an all-night café to play chess.  
But back at my hotel I cannot sleep  
As neath my room the strip-joint's bass booms deep.

To Vienna, whose cultured legacy  
Drew me thro clean streets beautifully lined  
With splendid architectural fancy,  
As though some great mind had mused and designed  
A capital of neatest majesty.  
Yet amid these impressions I do find,  
As I look out from the Opera House roof,  
I'm surrounded by pompous pigs aloof.

*"What the fuck am I doing in Hungary!?"*  
Think I as I search for somewhere to rest,  
In the dirty, bustlin, car-choked, friendly

Bullet-hole-wall-lined streets of Budapest,  
Whose architecture is touched by Turkey,  
Laced with consumerism of the west;  
I find the Mellow Mood Hostel – what luck!  
For four pounds a night it's as cheap as fuck.

The Turks may have come to murder Magyars  
But to their beautifly built baths I go  
To boil in the waters, cool in the spas,  
Immersed in readin Shelleys dreamy flow,  
When a 'Cisco lawyer goes for my arse  
*"What the fuck was that?!"* – he offers to blow,  
Blood muddies the waters, he gets the point  
I click! It's a freakin gay pick-up joint.

I meet a tasty lass, so out we go  
The price of a nice evening meal to share,  
*"I'm from Richmond, where Edgar Allen Poe  
Was born."* *"I'm from Burnley, Lancashire."* *"Where?"*  
The Ghoulash is great & the wine doth flow  
Out to the street where we breathe the sweet air,  
&, in a moment of drunken romance,  
I kiss'd her neck & seized my shagging chance

I left the lass dreaming in my bunk bed;  
Shit, shower, shave, pack, roll up sleepin bag  
Greet the warm morning, buy freshly baked bread,  
Cheap beer & cheap cigs from this gypsy hag,  
Play chess in the street, get really wasted  
Swindle a swindler with a Kingside blag  
Then head on west along the railway line  
& get me kicked off near the border line.

Neath the European night sky, thick starred,  
I find myself in a desolate zone  
Tip-toein' past the sleepin border guard

Relics from the cold war the scene adorn  
Then two Austrians thought they were hard  
With angry clashin voices of slabstone -  
I looked straight down the barrel of a gun,  
*"Who won the fuckin war!?"* & pass'd right on.

I take the greatest train jump of my tour  
From Vienna to Villach on a sleek  
Inter-City, as each Alp towers o'er  
My little carriage, each volcanic peak  
Thrust from the lush green fertile valley floor  
With breathtakin beauty - I could not speak,  
Til taking dinner by a mountain stream -  
Villach's guardians echoed to my scream.

## Part 2 Italy

How glad am I to enter Italy,  
For the call of the muse grows ever strong -  
Like some wild animal trapp'd inside me -  
To find a form in my juvenile song.  
Snowy mountains shrink into flat country,  
Thru lazy fields of green we zoom along,  
Til Venice, as Italy greets my feet  
I see a sparklin canal, where's the street?

Three days I spend in ardour Venetian  
& sleep in a disused railway carriage  
& walk around this floatin museum  
Or float on a barge, there is a marriage  
Tween my poet's soul & elysian,

My traveling dreams committed to the page,  
As here in this old city sweet I savor  
My first Italian ice cream flavor!

Thru Venice I, a poetic rover,  
Roaming by night, guitar over back slung,  
Sit neath a statue of Casanova,  
Songs composed in Southern England are sung,  
My star attracts coins for each great number,  
These tuneful taylor's melodiously wrung,  
& after playing for an hour or so  
Buzzy black bongo bangers join my flow.

Distant Riviera di Levante  
Is my destination & mine arts goal,  
But first the mausoleum of Dante  
To tap into a predecessors soul,  
Overgrown with moss & creeping ivy,  
O man, you were the wildest of us all!  
Ravenna, this may be a swift sojourn,  
But one day, with my wife, I shall return.

How balmy is the Florentine evening,  
Here Dante's sweet new style softened his tongue,  
Outside Shelley's old villa I'm busking,  
& soon attract a most beautiful throng  
Of German fraulines who are visiting  
This sultry city, entranced by my song  
Two of them follow me into a park  
For passionate encounters in the dark.

We awake &, after cappuccinos,  
Wander these moped streets, a sacred city  
Thro which the grand, argent-sheen'd Arno flows-  
To buy a book to fill with poetry.  
On the title page Maya draws a rose

Then buy fresh foods & climb a hill where we  
Build a fire, cook dinner, watch the sunshine  
Fade over Florence with a sweet red wine.

*'How romantic it is to be abroad,  
Free from the chains of a workin mans day,'*  
Think I whilst walkin the main Pisan road  
Passin a troupe of buskers on the way  
& with guitar, pens & notebook my load  
I've arrived & all my dreams seem OK  
Then see the leaning tower - am I drunk?  
On further inspection one side has sunk.

Returning from the tower I do meet  
The busker's troupe in musical mid-flow  
There is an old black bluesman with bare feet,  
A dark Chilean named Kapitano  
And a saxman who sultrifies the street.  
They offer me wine, I add my oestro,  
You've never heard a more raunchier noise  
& just like that! I am one of the boys.

I settle with this best of holidays;  
Each one begins with pasta from a nun,  
Then idle hours spent musin neath the rays  
Of an English summer-like springtime sun  
Then in the warm evenin I do amaze  
The Pisan public with song-craft sweet spun,  
And blitzed on six bottles of Tuscan red  
Outside a church we make our cardboard bed.

I jump a train to San Guilliano  
To walk on Shelley's mountains, but instead  
I sit in the street with old man Franco.  
He ploughs me with red, risotto & bread

Plus a whole sow's leg - my stomach doth blow.  
Well we cannot understand a word said,  
Still we talk about the war, England, life,  
Italy, poetry & his dead wife.

I wander up the coastline for to muse,  
Set up my camp in the cliffside quarry,  
Resplendent in luscious blue sea-side views,  
Round the chapel of Portovenere,  
For here, tonight, my life & art shall fuse  
& I, awakened to my destiny,  
Prepare for the sun to set 'low the line,  
By buildin fire, entrin town, stealin wine.

With topless bottle of red in my hand  
Up the cliff-face I scamper with the might  
Of some fabled hero from Plato's land.  
I claim the top, where gulls in freedoms flight,  
Silhouette the settin sun, a wide band  
Of gold spread cross azure seas, from this height  
I muse on the rippling sea meadows blue -  
This evening gives birth to a poet true.

I pause to reflect on the life I knew,  
Nice house, nice job, nice girl, nice skunk, nice deal  
& compare it to these skies & seas of blue  
And this sense of assurity I feel.  
At joinin the elite, select brave few  
No more a cog on the soul grindin wheel.  
Besides, England does my fuckin brain in  
& I bet, as I write, it is rainin'.

Then as I spent my heart's epiphany  
The last sun-chink slipping below the line,  
Her last shed ray sped cross the darkling sea  
To sparkle on an object, close, divine

A *Silver Rose*, so lovely & so wee,  
Had caught my eyes with its delightful shine,  
So I carried this moment's momento  
Back to my camp, led by its lamp-like glow.

### **Part 3**

### **Rome**

Soon I am back in bohemian swing  
Musing away - one long, mellow daydream,  
By the side of the Arno sometimes sing  
Or bathe in the sun embracing ice-cream,  
Or busk to the world as a poet-king,  
Or party hard with Kapitano's team;  
How life is forever tender to me  
Having tasted the breath of Italy.

In the warm mornin after a party  
I sit with Kapitano round a fire  
He teaches me the bird-songs of Chile  
And buskers secrets – my mind moves higher  
Thus alone I wander thru the city  
Musin until Wow! My love-light desire  
Sat on the grass, nice ass, bangin bongos  
To describe the way I feel the song goes.

She is to me as the first star of eve  
With ocean eyes & smile of teeth pearl white,

And breasts & bum like you wouldn't believe,  
My heart melteth at the sensual sight  
Of beauties first essence, which I receive  
In raptures, as we, by the Arno's flight  
Are as one with the sweet serene sundown –  
“*Meet me in Rome,*” we kiss & she leaves town.

Headin down south on the *click-clack* train track  
Tis two AM, the conductor finds me  
With a bag of books, the rags on my back  
And in my hands a copy of Shelley.  
I expect a Hampshire inspector's flak  
But he hands me his poetic pity –  
Six hours later, the twilight before dawn,  
I walk the streets of Rome awaitin morn.

Up o'er the Eternal City doth come  
The mellow yellow orb of Italy  
As I stroll around the Colloseum  
I muse upon my growing poetry,  
The chariot race soonest won – struck dumb  
By an awesome empire's decadency -  
Yet senses of fallen grandeur pervade  
For glory lasts as long as summer shade.

I jump a tram this sunniest of days  
Down into the tourist-laden city,  
Upon the Spanish Steps I pause & laze  
Then walk into a shrine of poetry  
Tis true that a true poet seldom pays,  
Reciting a passage from my Shelley,  
I get in for free, see hand at first hand,  
Awaken'd to kinship - mine art, my band.

I sharpen my features & dress to impress  
& enter a candlelit theatre,

Some dark, grecian drama well in progress  
Where I see my marvelous Manuela  
A smiling, sexy, stage-struttin' actress,  
& I knew right then that I must have her,  
*"You look beautiful, like a silver rose!"*  
Soon by her hotel bed are flung our clothes

Leaving her sleepin, into the city,  
I roam, the sweet sun illumines the streets,  
Find the tranquil Protestant cemetery,  
And in Shelley's tower my muse completes  
Her visitation. I feel tired, empty,  
But wait! As I stood by the grave of Keats  
I felt ready to try the train-jump home,  
& did one from the glory that was Rome.

I cash'd in my emergency tenner,  
& with canned beef I bought in Hungary,  
To busk up a little extra lira,  
I hunger'd up the length of Italy  
Whereon my last evensongs of Pisa,  
Already it all seem'd a memory,  
For Kapitano had moved on to France  
To work the World Cup with a beggar's dance.

So leaving gentle Arno to her flow,  
Jumping trains to an uncertain future,  
I once again view'd Viareggio,  
Le Spezia, then pass'd thro Genoa,  
Spent sunset in the streets of Torino,  
Then caught a sleeper to the French border -  
But travel does not always go to plan,  
Somehow my train had landed to Milan!

I was now sev'ral hundred miles of course,  
& how it happen'd did not understand,

But youth is driven by a hidden force,  
& made me jump a train to Switzerland  
At whose harsh border found a smart resource  
For they had rejected me out of hand -  
I look'd like a tramp - past midnight grew tense,  
Until I found a hole shewn from the fence.

I felt like I'd escaped Colditz Castle,  
But as I pass'd thro chocolate Zurich,  
I was toss'd into a world of hassle,  
The Swiss care not for buskers & their reek,  
After lots of shouting & a wrestle,  
I was thrown in a police cell for my cheek,  
But by sundown eveything was sorted -  
The next day I was to be deported!

They marched me on a fancy Swiss Air Jet,  
Handcuffed until the very last moment,  
For I had slipped right thro their border net,  
Back to mine own contree had to be sent,  
On fine french wine my flight home growing wet  
& thanks to their filthy rich government -  
I had thirty-five pounds worth of Swiss Francs,  
To sexy stewardesses kiss'd my thanks.

I was so thrill'd to drop into Heathrow  
Tho from the wine a little worse for wear,  
To Ruth's apartment hopefully did go -  
At first she gave me such a startled stare,  
But soon we recommenced romance's flow  
& as I read my poems with soft air,  
She said "*Why don't we take a bath, my sweet,*"  
With that hot wash my Grand Tour was complete.

**Part 4**  
**The Death of Shelley**

*Being an account of the Drowning of Percy Shelley off the Italian coast, 1822*

(i)

The sticky noontime heat of the month of June moves,  
Trails rainbow shimmers glimmering in sommer's honey'd air,  
Baking the clay-caked walls & the rouge-blush'd rooves  
Of Leghorn's sleeping house-huddle, nestle'd seaside fair,  
The simple clip-clack of the cart-horses' hooves  
& the fruitsellers fly-whip disturb the dusty square –  
Yet see amidst the hazy mist of lazy lethargy,  
Down by the docks, a busy lot, lock'd in activity.

Each is a stranger to these sultry lands,  
Drawn by th' eternal sommershine gold,  
Hunt unravels the main sail, wipes his hands,  
Williams dissapears into the hold,  
& by two local Polizie nobly stands  
Trelawney, like some arab hero of old,  
"We're ready to sail!" Shelley shrills in delight –  
Above hover seagulls in vulture-like flight.

Trelawney & Hunt are refused this tide  
A local lad swells the crew to three,  
From steely moorings the ropes are untied,  
The boat slips sheepishly into the sea,  
Tween th'oak'beam'd berth & the stout ship side  
Friendly farewells part this good company –  
Thus as they go gliding oer wide, rolling realm  
Sheely strides proudly to master the helm.

The mainsail puff'd proud, a mountain goat's chest,  
Thro the tall, wall'd docks that serpent-lock the sea,  
Past the citadel that rests, maternal lioness,  
& the snail-paced, sail-graced fuggazi  
They cruise, til alone, two views to digest,  
Serene on the green twinkling tranquility;  
The empty nothingness of the nautical line  
& the ever dwindling narrowness of Leghorn behind.

The sun blasts vermeil rays as Viareggio passes by,  
Beyond stand an ancyent row of volcanic antiques,  
A brotherhood of mountain kings to touch the Tuscan sky  
Clothed in piny forest robes & crown'd with cloudy peaks  
Silent as the nympean sea where Naiads go to die  
Thro the vivid, velvet blue the sailboat ploughs & creaks  
Now Shelley's eyes rest on the wide horizon's ochre shine,  
Where looming black, doom-laden clouds have grimly fill'd the line.

With the might of many armies the storm-swept seas came,  
Trumpeted in thunder by Zion's cymval crash,  
The *Ariel* pierc'd by slashing arrowheads of rain  
As fierce, charging cavalryman's flashing lances slash,  
The crew engaged in battle tho they battle now in vain,  
For thro the splint'ring ranks of planks pours the deadly wash –  
Cries Williams, "*Dear Percy, for sure we all must drown!*"  
Now words heard in reply, just a curt & curious frown.

A spiral whirlpool flows at he center of the tempest,  
What swirling wall of water – into a hand it grows,  
Crushes the poor *Ariel* within its liquid fist,  
Each smash'd-up piece of broken boat flies thro the sky like crows,  
Into the air, with streaming hair, Shelley spins with a twist,  
& leaves behind two helpless cries as the wild wave throws  
Him hard into the churning foam of violent, ridg'd expanses  
Now Shelley shall find Heaven in just seven lonely stanzas

<ii>

Lone, all alone with the sublime cold  
& the storm-adorn'd view of teh jaded lime  
The thirsty sea takes its icy hold  
So close to the end of a young man's time  
Whose last living moments shall slowly unfold  
Forever engraved on a true poet's mind;  
Above the emerald empire, where with a ducking motion  
& the expectancy of death he is suck'd into the ocean.

There dwells a special peace 'neath the underswell skies  
No more by the storm-blast batter'd & bruis'd  
A whispy green mist overfloweth the eyes,  
He swears he sees the shape of his dear, departing muse  
So his heart, for the last time, sings to seize a prize  
With effervescent energy his essence is enthused  
For from this faerie offering the fires of poesy's blissdom  
Fuel the thoughts that crown his short life's search for truth &  
wisdom

On the strength of a swan's dying song he shall draw  
Bends his long legs like the strings of a bow  
Extends their full length with a kingly roar  
Thrusts through the scene as a singing arrow,  
Like a champion of war, blood-soak'd & drench'd in gore  
He bursts first through the Earth;s drifting flow  
Thumps' through the air in triumphant defiance  
His lungs drawing deep in an age-old alliance!

In solitude, alive, upon the wave highest,  
Viweing a crack in the black, cloudy dome,  
Towards him a bright shaft of gold gently flyest,  
Starbright sign of the flight of the storm,

As he sinks, inch-by-inch, the sweet heaven sighs,  
His curls flow unfurl'd on the crest of the foam,  
As into the deep sea, quite calmy, he slips  
Dissapearing... arms... wrists... palms... fingertips...

*“What is death, but the final gate  
That bars teh fair path to Paradise,  
Unless a life was consumed by hate,  
Eternity, then, is not so nice  
Still, we all walk to the whims of fate  
& time is measured on chessboards of rice!”*  
Thinks Shelley, now ready for the fond farewell  
To life's precious breath – death, Heaven or Hell!

He drifts forlornly to the deep  
Slowly onflowing the serene  
Land of slumbers, as asleep,  
His spirit shifts into a dream  
Death's pale shadow's ghastly creep  
Man's soul's aura's ghostly sheen  
Bright luster fading from the eyes  
Then gone, as the one we call Shelley dies.

Upon the twilit, silent surface ropes & timber glide  
Flotsam & Jetsam, whose presence bears the proof  
Of three romantic sailors taken by the Tuscan side  
This day has lost a poet to the dangers of his youth,  
Through the dusk descending walks the Drak Knight's bride  
Lady moon enflows her starry dress across the roof  
Night draws the seven huesw from the air, teh land, the sea  
Then paints the wider world with such a wonderous ebony!

<iii>

The River Arno is a gentle thing

As it makes his way from the Florentine  
Hills, & is clean & as fresh as Spring,  
Being bless'd with a music soft, serene,  
Like the chorus of church bells that ring  
Out over an evening Pisan scene,  
Where sits Lord Byron, sketching the sunset,  
In thoughts for a friendship he'd never forget.

As the stars rose above his verandah  
He solemnly look'd on the sullen moon,  
Allow'd his clouded mind to meander  
Upon a poet's death, all too soon,  
Beneath lay the makings of a great stanza,  
But quickly he lost this Aeshylean boon,  
For dowsed was the muses' mysterious flame  
By a man down the street, running, calling his name.

Tw'as Leigh Hunt who came on O so fast,  
Bringing bad news to below Byron's window,  
*"By George, George, we have found him at last,  
Wash'd up on the sands of Viareggio,  
The anxious waitings of these ten days pass'd,  
Bears sad fruit as his fate we now now!"*  
*"Very well,"* said his lordship, *"We sleep here tonight,  
Then tomorrow we rise & ride with first light."*

Onwards, onwards, onwards rides the plot,  
Soon all of the players shall be in their place;  
Past the hovels of Viareggio two horses trot  
As tho' drawing a hearse at a funeral pace,  
They reach the long beach, ever humid & hot,  
Today the sands lie like a dead, desert waste,  
Then stride to the side of the shimmering sea –  
Awaiting with handshakes is grim-faced Trelawney!

In the minute of which a lonely lifetime lasts

The swollen sands are stack'd into a heap,  
Hunt stands agape, Byron stands aghast  
As Shelley is unslumber'd from his sunken sleep  
In horrid exhumation! his life's light has pass'd,  
Leaves a crack'd & blacken'd corpse where rotting flesh-things creep,  
*"Is – is – that a body?"* Byron whispers, bleeding white,  
*"Aye!"* sighs Trelawney, *"Tis not a pretty sight!"*

With quickening quiet comes the onrushing roar  
Of the hush'd seawashes in violences,  
Shelley's featherlite frame two young brutes bore,  
Carried to the pyre amidst silences,  
& crown'd! Hunt begins to over him pour  
Frankincense & other oily essences –  
A poet soon burning upon the gutted gyre,  
His soul to the stars, his body to the fire.

& so, a poet's death, a deepfelt, tragic thing,  
Enough to rouse Apollo from his dusty throne,  
With waking, honour'd horror I am shaking as I sing,  
For one dark day this grim event shall be mine own –  
& wonder whether my demise inspires a flowering,  
Or be a fading epitaph upon a jaded stone?  
& what did I learn of my musing on death –  
This life is too special to waste precious breath.