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# Reading Europe: The Reading List of the Women's Rest Tour Association

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## Abstract

From A. J. C. Hare to Mrs. Oliphant and Henry James to S. J. Duncan, the Boston-based Women's Rest Tour Association provided a carefully selected reading list for its self-styled 'literary pilgrims' from its founding in the 1890s into the 20th century. As an organization designed to support educated American women, particularly teachers, traveling on a budget, the WRTA provided members with a range of information to facilitate travel, including lists of approved lodgings and recommended readings. While its focus was largely on travel within Great Britain, a 'Continental Supplement' was also provided. The WRTA's recommendations included practical guidebooks, such as Baedeker and English travel writer A. J. C. Hare's popular walking guides. The WRTA's main focus, however, was on educational reading with a strong literary bent. Cultural history and the antiquity of Europe were high on its agenda, while the quaint and picturesque were repeatedly privileged over the more obviously political. The reading list also advised that the novel should receive priority as a rich source for immersing oneself in a foreign country: 'There is a liberal education to be had in a study of English novels: those who have long steeped their souls in this delightful atmosphere have acknowledge not to be despised concerning customs and people.' Continental authors appeared relatively infrequently on the reading list whereas established American writers such as Henry James, Washington Irving, and Harriet Beecher Stowe were recommended. The personal accounts of a number of American women travellers and writers such as Amy Fay and Kate Field as well as the Boston expatriates Francesca Alexander and Virginia W. Johnson were included; in general, however, considerable preference was given to British writers, revealing an anglophile bias within the organization and a distinct tension between the experience of American travellers and a reliance on the cultural authority of Great Britain.

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